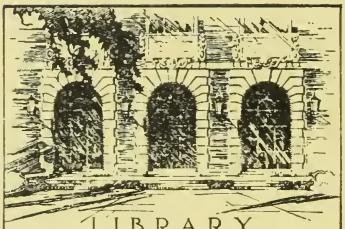
MRS BOUVERIE



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MRS. BOUVERIE

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "AS IN A LOOKING-GLASS," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

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MRS. BOUVERIE.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN mention was made of the "Doctor" in Threegates it was not mistaken for an allusion to any member of the Faculty. Not but what Threegates had its practitioners, of course—one of them even, by comparison with his colleagues, was accounted clever—but these gentlemen were referred to more expressly by their surnames, and the "Doctor," pure and simple, was the term belonging to the Rev. Canon Heath.

The Rev. Canon Heath had been part and parcel of the place for so many years that it was difficult to imagine it without him. He had

Gen Res English

christened young women who now brought their own children to the font. He could remember the plans being submitted for the Town Hall, and when the factory lads played cricket on the site of the new Post Office. He called Threegates his home, though he had not been born there, and in view of the many changes he had witnessed and wrought in it, it must be admitted that he had every right to do so.

Pecuniarily he could without doubt have done much better than minister to the spiritual and intellectual requirements of the congregation which filled the Parish Church. His sermons, despite his efforts to adapt them to the local understanding, obtained no higher appreciation than might have been secured by the "dilettante priest" ordained. His gifts (to the lay mind) were wasted, and his culture was caviare. On the other hand, he effected a great deal of practical good—had been prime mover in several sanitary improvements, was teaching the pro-

vincial mind that literature was not limited to the daily issue of the *Examiner and Advertiser* —and, though he had twice been offered a Colonial Bishopric, had declined to abandon his living on altruistic grounds.

He had three children—Marion, Christabel, and Frank. As a general rule, the youngest of the family is always spoilt, though there are exceptions which prove it. When the youngest is the only son, he is spoilt invariably, and there are no exceptions. Frank being the last born and of the "superior sex," was impregnated with a sense of his superiority almost from his birth. His sisters had tired of their dolls, and lavished their adoration upon the baby. As a child he was coaxed and fondled, as a boy he was deferred to, and that he did not develop into an unbearable young prig was due far more to the inherent sweetness of his disposition than to any merit of his early surroundings. No man is always wise—not even a Canon—and before he

went to Harrow (where they taught him otherwise) Frank, with all his cheerfulness, was the least bit possible in danger of beginning to regard the Creation as a premature arrangement for his advent.

The Doctor's stipend, as has already been hinted, was not a large one. Harrow was a drain upon it, and Cambridge necessitated domestic economies which it would be vulgar to unveil. That the lad should have a University education, however, was to his father's mind almost a *sine quâ non*, and that the question of fulfilling the cherished plan should have been debated and weighed spoke volumes for the natural fairness of the man. Frank was his Benjamin, the *alpha* and *omega* of his worldly ambition, but he was aware that indirectly much of the cost of the project must recoil upon the girls. He laid the matter squarely before them both, hiding neither the *pros* nor *cons*.

"If he goes," he said, "he will leave Trinity

a sound classical scholar ; he will enter life with the hall-mark of a gentleman upon him ; and he will carry a credential which will always be of infinite value to his career. On the other hand, I do not think that Frank will ever take Orders ; for all practical purposes he might obtain a much more thorough and a far cheaper training at the London University. You are old enough to have opinions on the subject, my dears, and I am sensible enough to recognize the fact. Speak your minds."

Here he leant forward in his chair, polished his glasses, and tried to believe that he was prepared for either fate.

The girls did not take long in answering, and their manner of doing so was characteristic. Christabel threw back her pretty head with a laugh, and cried "Cambridge" without an instant's delay. Marion's beautiful face was grave for some seconds while she balanced the inconvenience of her father's shabby wardrobe

against the strenuousness of his desire, and then she too cast her vote. She said,—

"Cambridge, dad; let us do the most in our power for him."

"I thought you would say so," murmured the happy Canon. "It is my own view, and Cambridge let it be."

That was how Frank Heath went to Cambridge and became the possessor of a bull-pup that he did not want, and the giver of "wines" that he could not afford. That was how he came to be dressed by a Cambridge tailor, who emulated the audacity of Savile Row in his charges if he failed to imitate its cut.

It is not my intention to draw a picture of a University career. Excepting Monte Carlo, there is nothing which novelists have worn quite so industriously to death. Everybody knows, either from experience or at secondhand, of its latitude, and its temptations, and its follies. Everybody knows that a University career

never fails to teach one thing, whatever other lessons may be derived from the curriculum. It teaches boys to regard themselves as men, and then upon occasion reminds them of the truth with crushing effect. Frank might have continued the course of "wines," and bull-pups, and tailors' bills *ad infinitum*, without any unpleasant notice being taken by the authorities. He might have landed himself up to the neck in debt, and ruined his people—these things to the Academic mind would have been trivialities —but the error which could not be overlooked, and which brought him to grief, was his impudence in dispensing with leave to run up to town.

As a matter of fact, the motive was venial enough. He was very anxious to witness a *matinée* to be given at a certain West-end theatre, and had been determined to gratify the inclination by a bet of Dashaway's, of Trinity Hall, that he would never have the pluck. To tell Frank

that he would never have the pluck to do a thing was as certain a method of propulsion as to pull a pig backward by the tail. He went to the *matinée*, and enjoyed it immensely.

Even then he might have escaped his Nemesis, but when the performance was over he turned into a restaurant in the Strand, to dine before catching his train. In the restaurant he met a fellow he knew, and the fellow—so easy is the fatal descent—proposed terminating the evening at a music hall. The music hall was left before ten o'clock, but when Mr. Heath reached St. Pancras he found it was impossible to return to Cambridge before the morning. He and the fellow who had accompanied him stood and looked at each other blankly on the platform.

Then he was "sent down." Dashaway's wager enabled him to settle with local tradespeople, but as he travelled towards Threegates facing the prospect of the explanation at home,

Frank was disagreeably conscious that they had been dearly paid.

His had never been more than the thoughtless faults of youth and high spirits, but he felt that his responsibility was black indeed as he leant back in his corner of the compartment, gazing gloomily out at the flying banks and fields. The old man's pride in him, the girls' belief, the castles which had been so fondly built on his success, all came back and shamed him to the heart. Much of these memories had become partially effaced and dim in his new life, but now they recurred to him, and with painful force. He foresaw the faces that would shortly meet him, conjectured the first words that each member of the family would speak. He knew his sisters would say, "Well, never mind," and wear a brave front, so as not to appear to reproach him. He knew that Christabel, who was almost of his own age, would sympathize with him most, and that Marion would be gravely

tender. His father's manner he could not divine ; and it was his father, although he had never been in the slightest degree afraid of him, whom he dreaded most keenly to meet. After all, his father would feel it most deeply, he thought ; and he sighed again.

The porters shouted "Threegates" as carelessly as if he had come back as senior wrangler, and had taken a first-class in classics as well, and the young man made his way out of the familiar station and into the sunny street. It was market day, and the square was thronged. He stared before him with eyes that did not see, and strode between the crowd with lowered head.

Presently the house was within sight, and his pulse began to beat a shade more quickly. The servant was just running in from an errand, and the door stood open. He gained it before it shut behind her, and inquired if anyone was in.

She welcomed him with inappropriate delight.

"Your father's in the study, Mr. Frank," she said, and reiterated her foolish pleasure.

He pushed past her and knocked. The Doctor was writing at his desk. He looked up from the sermon paper as his son paused awkwardly on the threshold.

CHAPTER II.

"FRANK?" he said, interrogatively.

The young fellow moved across to the desk before he answered. Vaguely he was sensible that he would have felt better with the pipe still in his mouth.

"Oh, yes, it's I," he said; "I've come back again like the bad shilling!"

"The bad shilling?" The smile of pleased surprise on the Canon's face began to be tinged by misgiving. "The bad shilling," he repeated, laying down his pen. "What do you mean, Frank?"

Something stuck in the boy's throat. He coughed and looked away, while the nervousness on the Canon's face increased.

"What is it, my lad?"

"I've been sent down, and I'm——" he swallowed the adjective, "ashamed of myself!"

The window attracted him. He strode over to it, and stood with his back to the room, staring at something he did not see.

The Doctor had turned very pale. He rested his elbows on the desk, and sat, his head supported by his palms, gazing at the figure of his son.

There was a little clock on the mantlepiece which ticked noisily.

The boy turned sharply, with the Doctor's hand on his shoulder. "It was nothing *dishonourable*, Frank?"

"On my honour, no, father!" And he told him what it was.

"Sit down," said the Canon, gently; "let us talk it over."

"I am ever so much sorrier than I can say!"

declared Frank. "I don't know what demon possessed me to do such an idiotic thing. Of course you are taking it awfully well, and you don't reproach me or anything, but I know perfectly how you must be feeling over it. If I could undo it all——"

"Well, well," said his father, "you *will* undo it all! When you go back you will wipe it out, my boy: your honours shall cover your folly —take courage!"

"There are the girls—what will they say?"

"The girls shall help you to bear your rustication patiently. Have a cigar, and pull yourself together before you join them. I'll go and prepare them, if you like—perhaps it will spare you some awkwardness."

The culprit looked at him gratefully.

"What a brick you are!" he muttered. "But I'll do that job myself—I deserve it. Are they at home?"

"You will find them," answered the Doctor,

"upstairs. They are going to a bazaar for the benefit of the Blind School, and I daresay they are counting their sixpences. Now be off with you, and leave me to do my work."

But his work was not resumed immediately, and for awhile after the other's retirement he sat thoughtful and still. He was pained more deeply than he would show even to Marion and Christabel. He was not angry, he had no ill-temper to suppress; but he was disappointed, bitterly disappointed, and the last sentences he had written, when he forced himself to read them, conveyed no meaning to his mind. It occurred to him that the sermon he had designed to encourage and improve his congregation was powerless to assuage his own grief. The thought distressed him, and fermented into reflections which called for literary form. It was a digression, but it was spontaneous. He dipped the quill in the ink, and continued his task, without effort, and with a subtlety which

would be as far above his parishioners' heads as the steeple of the church. "Thus," murmured the old man, with returning tranquility, "we may see how true it is that there is 'good in everything'!"

Meanwhile Frank had broken his bad news, and been comforted; and then the subject was tabooed, or at least reserved, as one more adapted to private conference than general conversation. It was ignored at the luncheon table, and the quartette found itself rather a silent one in consequence.

Frank, on the whole, was not sorry that his sisters were due at a bazaar. The prospect of the afternoon to himself was welcome, and after bidding them *au revoir*, and seeing his father closeted in the study again, he turned into the garden, ensconcing himself in a deck chair, with a book on his knees for the sake of appearance.

He had not done much more than idly turn

the first few leaves, when he was surprised by the sound of the opening of the gate, and, looking up, saw a woman entering from a lane into which it led.

She was a stranger to him, although he knew most of the people in Threegates, and a glance sufficed to show him that she was a visitor from town. It was evidenced in her costume, her carriage; it was confirmed by her voice. London, and West-end London, was stamped upon her from her delightful and ridiculous bonnet to the tips of her shoes.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "can you tell me if Miss Heath has gone?"

He rose. What was this beautiful woman doing here?

"My sisters have both gone," he answered; "they left a few minutes ago. They will be awfully sorry. I don't think they expected you."

"They didn't. I thought I'd look in on

the way to the school-room. You are the brother, then? I didn't know you were at home."

"I am 'the brother,'" he said. "And at this moment very glad that I *am* at home!"

"I am Mrs. Bouverie." She smiled as if amused by the compliment. "I have seen a good deal of your father and sisters since I have been staying at the Hall. They are so kind as to allow me to drop in upon them sometimes, even without ringing a bell. So you are 'Mr. Frank,' and you have come home? I have heard a lot about you, Mr. Frank!"

"I am sorry for it. I must be rather a disappointment!" he responded, awkwardly. There was a shade of matronly interest in her tone which her seniority scarcely warranted. One's boyhood must be already past before one can appreciate a pretty woman treating one as a boy. He stroked the moustache he hoped for.

"When did you arrive?"

"This morning," he said. "Won't you sit down?"

"I'm afraid I haven't time," she murmured, sinking on to the bench. "What is it—a vacation?"

"Er—no," he said, "not exactly. How do you like Threegates, Mrs. Bouverie?"

"I think it is charming; I've been promising the Weatherley's to come and stay with them for years, and now that I'm here I reproach myself for never having come before. What a pretty garden yours is? Is that why you haven't gone to the bazaar—fresh air and literature? I see I have interrupted you. What are you reading?"

"I wasn't reading," he replied; "I was thinking."

"Thinking of the future when you will be a dignitary of the Church yourself? No? You don't mean that you are not going in for Orders, do you? What do you mean to be?"

"I haven't decided what I mean to be," said, Frank. "What do you advise?"

She looked at him and laughed.

"Both our questions are premature, aren't they, considering I have only just met you? Well, Mr. Frank, I beg your pardon for my inquisitiveness."

He deprecated the apology he had invited, and waxed anomalously confidential, as became his age.

"I think," he confessed, "I should like to write."

"To write?" she repeated, attentively.

"Yes." There was a blush on his face, for he was partially ashamed of himself for telling her this sacred truth. "I think I should like to be an author!"

'An author," said Mrs. Bouverie, "is so vague a term. Do you mean you hope to be a novelist?"

"I have written little sketches and things,"

he said, diffidently; "it may be stupid, but I believe I have some faculty that way."

"Why 'stupid'? I think the reverse; it is very interesting. If you would lend me one of your manuscripts I—— Not that my opinion is worth anything——"

"Oh," he declared, "I am sure it would be worth a great deal. But I should never have the pluck!"

"Am I so terrible?"

She lifted her eyes, and smiled again. He found, on the contrary, that she was adorable. Perhaps she guessed it, for she changed the subject.

"But you have not explained to me how I see you here?" she said. "Yesterday I had no idea that you were looked for."

He would have infinitely preferred to question her instead, and he paused in confusion. During his pause a few words about her may not come amiss to the reader.

The only child of wealthy parents, Constance Bouverie had married, at the age of nineteen, a man who gave her everything that marriage can bring excepting sympathy. This may seem a euphemism for saying she wedded unhappily, but it was the way she expressed it herself, and if in her heart she suffered, she bore her disillusion in a manner which was far from disillusionizing the world. The brilliance of her alliance was cited among mothers, and envied among daughters; and down to the day when ill-temper and inherited apoplexy joined forces to nip an intended baronetcy in the bud, and to set her free, she was popularly regarded as a phenomenon of luck.

She was twenty-three when she entered upon her widowhood, and, both her father and mother having previously died, she found herself at her husband's decease one of the richest women in England. Independent and childless, her solitary care was the necessity she felt to pre-

serve some slight acquaintance with the multifarious sources of her income. Her ground-rents, her railway-stock, her mining shares, the wish to be *au courant* with their respective values, imposed upon her only obligations. Her ambitions were less definite, but, though she was now but twenty-nine, she had once or twice been conscious of a vague desire to play the part of mentor to some boy of talent, to whom she could stand, as it were, *in loco parentis*, and in whose ultimate success she should participate by a reflected glory. The idea had even carried her so far as to debate the advisability of an adoption, but the difficulty of selecting a youngster calculated to do her credit had prevented the idea ever developing into an actual fact. A stupid *protégé*, she felt, would mortify her beyond endurance. She inclined towards a boy old enough to have already demonstrated his ability, but she had never met one, and the notion was not sufficiently deep-rooted for her

to have taken any extraordinary steps towards his discovery.

She lifted her eyes to Frank, and smiled. "But you have not explained to me how I see you here?" she said.

His silence came to an end, though he hated to have to speak.

"The truth is," he stammered, horribly humiliated, "I have been sent down—rusticated for an offence!"

CHAPTER III.

SHE was old enough to be disappointed by his confession, and regarded him with grave surprise.

"I am sorry to hear you say so," she returned at length. "Dissipation in a young man is the very last thing that attracts me."

He flushed anew.

"I am not 'dissipated,'" he averred. "There was no harm in what I did; it was just a scrape."

"I like earnestness in men," said Mrs. Bouverie. "I like men one can look up to and admire. You must have given your father and sisters great pain by your folly."

"At least I am expiating it," remonstrated

Frank ; "the result isn't very jolly for me. No fellow cares to have to come home to his people with his tail between his legs, or feels delighted that the first word he has to say to a woman disgusts her with him." He gave a gulp, and looked at her with shamefaced homage. "I can imagine nothing that would please me more than to have returned covered with honours, and had you applauding me."

"Perhaps," she said, softened, "I may be able to applaud you yet."

He registered inward vows, and stumbled over the effort to express them.

"I must go," she murmured. She gave him her hand. He begged leave to escort her. They strolled to the door of the bazaar together, and he detailed the story of his disgrace, and was relieved to see she found the fault more venial than she had supposed it.

He went back to the garden with his head in the clouds. He was in love. He mentally

repeated all his conversation with her, and thought too late of many brilliant remarks—at once pathetic and witty—with which his narrative should have been embellished.

In the evening he spoke of her to Christabel, and sought tentatively to learn whether she had pronounced any opinion on him. He inquired if she came to the house frequently—whether her stay at Threegates was to be a long one. *À propos des bottes*, he assured his sisters they should one day be very proud of him. He committed, in fact, every one of the stupidities peculiar to a boy in his position, even to the composition of an ode and the erection of a castle in Spain. The Canon, who perceived his restlessness, attributed it to impatience for the end of his rustication.

In the ensuing fortnight Mrs. Bouverie called at the Vicarage more frequently than she had been wont to do. She did not deny to his relatives that she was interested in Frank.

"He has ability," she said to the Doctor; "he has aspirations, and he is as much mortified by his present situation as any of us need desire. I should like very much to be of use to him in his career, but I do not see what I can do. He wants to write, he tells me; nobody can help him to do that, and perhaps the greatest service one could render him would be to warn him not to do it at all."

To Frank himself she said: "Put your modesty in your pocket, and let me see a few of your manuscripts. If I think them rubbish, I shall say so." She was, however, conscious of an anxiety to find them clever, and when at length he brought himself to show some to her, she carried them home and opened them with a nervousness altogether foreign to her nature.

It was after reading what he had written that she recanted her opinion, and asserted that literature was the best profession for him.

"Candidly," she declared to his father, "I

believe he will succeed by his pen. I may be wrong, I may be right ; anyhow, there seems to me a promise in his work, and, after all, there are no especial prospects open to him in any other line. If he were my own son, I should give him his head, and plenty of paper."

The Canon, who was delighted at the favour she showed his boy, admitted that Frank's future must rest on his own efforts, and said that, if indeed he had a capacity for authorship, he at least possessed more capital for that vocation than any other. Frank, intoxicated by Mrs. Bouverie's approval, immediately foresaw a work that was to take London by storm, and felt himself famous in anticipation.

" I shall do everything that everybody would like to see at Cambridge," he alleged ; " I shall come back covered, like a Jack-in-the-green, with laurels ; and perhaps, just at the commencement, until my books produce an income, I may get an editorship, or something of the kind, to

keep the pot boiling. Oh, Mrs. Bouverie! I'll dedicate my first novel to you, in—in gratitude for your encouragement, if I may."

She masked amusement at his picture of commencing the life literary as an editor, because she knew an editor who considered he had attained the apex of things possible; and murmured that she certainly expected to hear he had earned great distinction when he "went up" again. Her visit to the Hall had now come to a conclusion, and the following day, after wishing her farewell, Frank sighed heavily in view of the dreary months which must pass before his *Alma Mater* would re-admit him.

When three months of the probation had worn away, his spirits revived a little, but it was at this period—amid the effervescence of his excellent resolutions—that he was called upon to endure the bitterest grief his life had held. His father died.

It occurred so suddenly that the boy was

half stunned. Only one consolation he had—he was with him. A cold, contracted on a rainy evening by conducting the service in wet clothes, had developed into inflammation of the lungs. All that love and skill could do for the good old man was done. His children waited on him hand and foot; the local practitioner was indefatigable in his ministrations. A physician was summoned at ruinous expense from town. Everything was vain, however, for the fiat had gone forth. Human aid was powerless before the Divine Will, and the Rev. Canon Heath had got his preferment at last.

The orphans looked at one another with haggard eyes. Once more, as by degrees the awful shock left them capable of reflection, their respective characters were evinced. Christabel, sobbing piteously, demanded comfort and encouragement; Frank cried valiantly that the girls were now his charge, and besought them with vague assurances to have confidence in his

unceasing protection; Marion added up the bills, and calculated the surplus to be expected from the sale of their furniture and effects.

They would have to leave Threegates, it was obvious, and live henceforward in cheap apartments somewhere. A University career was no longer possible for Frank, and the thing to be done was for him to secure a remunerative post without delay. Unfortunately the Doctor had had few or no influential friends, and, unpractical as the lad was, he could not blink the fact that the situation was extremely difficult. So far from having taken a degree, and obtained the "hall-mark" on which the Canon had insisted, he had quitted the classic portals under the shadow of an indiscretion. His talents, if indeed he had any, were wholly unproved, and though the girls might find themselves, when all the arrangements were made, with a sum sufficient to maintain them for a year or so without privation, his pride revolted at the notion

of owing his own support to their assistance.

A few days after the funeral, while sorrow and anxiety were robbing him of sleep and poisoning his youth, a letter to Marion came from Mrs. Bouverie. That lady wrote expressing her sincerest sympathy with their loss, and inquiring about their plans. She threw out a hint that if her presence at such a time would not be regarded as an intrusion, she would like to discuss Mr. Frank Heath's future with his sisters. "I know such a lot of people, I may be able to effect something useful," she added.

As a matter of fact, she had heard enough from her friends the Weatherleys to understand that the position was a critical one, and looked forward with eagerness to the fulfilment of her old dream. A clever boy, penniless and ambitious, had been sent to her at last!

"What shall I make of him?" said Constance Bouverie.

CHAPTER IV.

NOT many things are impossible to a brilliant woman ; and when she has beauty, and position besides, her range is practically boundless. Her visit to Threegates confirmed Mrs. Bouverie's view that literature should offer young Heath his first opening. She returned to Mayfair debating only how the desired opening should be secured.

Being, as has been said, inordinately rich, she was inclined to under-estimate the necessity of money ; so she considered literature as a road to fame rather than as an avenue to wealth, and did not propose to buy him a partnership in a publishing firm. Still less, however, did she

wish to see him playing at Chatterton in an attic, and primarily she was at some loss how to proceed.

It occurred to her that a Government appointment might leave him leisure to woo his particular Muse, and provide him at the same time with the sinews of war—a desirable conjunction —and, congratulating herself on the plan, she went the length of dining at a very dull house in order to meet the man who she had decided should effect it for her.

Unfortunately for Frank's impatience, the man was not there, and Mrs. Bouverie was so chagrined by the *ennui* to which she had condemned herself unavailingly, that she did nothing further in the matter for three days.

Even when the man was consulted, too, a Government appointment for anything over a hundred a year proved a far more difficult matter to arrange than she had supposed, and she was forced to abandon the idea and think

of something else. In this dilemma she wrote asking the editor to whom allusion has been made elsewhere to call on her. She said she was very anxious to have the privilege of his advice, and inquired whether he would lunch with her the following Sunday. One of the advantages of possessing a cook at three hundred a year is that you may count with a tolerable degree of certainty upon your invitations being accepted, and Mrs. Bouverie had small misgivings about Mr. Brocklebank's reply.

The editor of the *Hyde Park* was a man of about fifty years of age. He was clean-shaven and prematurely bald, and, his head and his countenance being of a delicate pink, he presented something of the appearance of a peeled shrimp. His qualifications for journalism, so far as his enemies could perceive, were a prodigious self-esteem and a capacity for writing the most illegible hand in London. He had, however, the good sense to surround himself by

a competent staff, and, though his detractors declared that its circulation was effected on exactly the same principles as stone soup, the sale of the *Hyde Park* gave many of its contemporaries, under more talented guidance, a bad beating.

"The fact is," said Mrs. Bouverie, when luncheon was over, and he had been given permission to smoke a much better cigar than he was accustomed to; "the fact is, I am interested in the son of a very valued friend—the late Canon Heath's boy. He has a strong tendency towards literature, and I want to get him on if I can. His father has not left him overburdened with means, and it is necessary he should make his own way in life. I am sure he has ability. Now tell me the wisest course for me to adopt."

Mr. Brocklebank crossed his legs with a bland smile. "My dear Mrs. Bouverie," he said, "to be perfectly frank with you—to speak

quite plainly—we are absolutely overrun with boys of ability. London is full of boys of ability. We don't want them—we haven't room for them! If you ask my advice, let your young *protégé* choose any other profession he likes—ours is the worst possible—and put his youthful lucubrations in the fire." Here he leant back as if he had said a very good thing, and, perceiving his estimate of it, Mrs. Bouverie laughed merrily.

"Everybody wants to write in his salad days," he continued, encouraged by appreciation, "or wants to go on the stage, perhaps. It's all as inevitable as the measles. To succeed in journalism or literature a man needs wonderful acuteness, powers of observation altogether above the average, and—er—a nice discriminating faculty which is wholly the exception."

"That is doubtless true," murmured Mrs. Bouverie, looking at him with admiration;

"but, all the same, I should like to give him his chance. My idea was to procure him the opportunity of learning something of the routine of a first-class journal; at present he knows so little of the practical part of the work. He would not be qualified to write for the paper at first, I daresay, but he would gain experience. If, for instance, it were possible to get him into touch with such a paper as your own, the advantage would be tremendous."

Mr. Brocklebank's expression implied that there were heights of which it was ludicrous even to dream.

"Heavy as the premium would be," she pursued, "I should think it well laid out. I should regard his future as assured with an opening like that."

The gentleman's expression was more complex than it had been. "I could not, as a friend, advise you to adopt such a plan," he said; "the expense would be so great."

"But the advantage," she insisted; "it would be proportionate."

"Modesty," said Mr. Brocklebank, "modesty forbids me to answer that."

"Of course I know it would," said she; "only I daren't ask a man in your position to be troubled with a novice."

"That is unkind of you," he answered, softly; "nothing could be a 'trouble' done for Mrs. Bouverie."

The butler stood beside him with liqueurs. He sipped a Bénédictine with the anticipatory sweetness of the cheque.

"You see," she said, "I realize that the sum would have to be substantial, because it is essential there should be a commencing salary of quite a hundred and fifty a year."

"Exactly," said Mr. Brocklebank; "just so."

"Will you think the matter over, and let me hear from you?" she asked.

He promised her he would. He promised that if he could see his way to obliging her, he would strain a point and do it. It occurred to him on the road home that his sub-editor might be less gratified by the arrangement than either he or she, but that was beside the question.

A few days later Frank received a note from Constance Bouverie to the effect that Mr. Brocklebank, of the *Hyde Park*, stood in need of a literary assistant. "So far as I can gather," she explained, "the post is not very highly paid; but as a beginning you might do worse than take it. I have spoken to the gentleman of you, and if you think the suggestion worth considering, go to the office one afternoon this week at three o'clock."

The postscript was: "And come in to tea afterwards, and tell me all the news."

CHAPTER V.

FRANK found it so well worth considering that he went up to town the following morning. Marion and Christabel, delighted with the news, kissed him affectionately, and watched him depart. He felt rather proud as he strode down the little lane towards the station, although he had not done anything as yet to merit the self-esteem. He felt vaguely that he was showing the stuff he was made of very quickly, and providing for his sisters by his abilities almost before they had had time to realize their destitution.

On reaching the Metropolis he judged that it was much too early for him to proceed to the

office of the *Hyde Park*, and he strolled about the streets for a couple of hours, imagining the interview that was to take place, and endeavouring to convince himself that he was not sanguine as to the result.

Mrs. Bouverie had said the salary was not a large one. He wondered what it actually was—whether it would suffice for their requirements. He did not question how much he, a novice, was worth, but how little a woman like Mrs. Bouverie would be satisfied to advocate his accepting. She was so stupendously rich herself, he reflected, that "not large" from her lips might be capable of almost any interpretation. Really, even five hundred a year could not be supposed to sound "large" to her—perhaps five hundred a year was the salary intended. He rolled a cigarette, and inhaled gratefully. With five hundred a year to commence with, to what heights might he not rise—to what might he not aspire? Then he

told himself he was a fool, which was the first wise thing he had said yet; and an awful misgiving assailed him that the editor would find him incompetent, and declare he would not do for any salary at all.

It was now two o'clock, and he turned into a restaurant in the Strand, and lunched moderately on a chop and half a pint of bitter beer. The chop finished, he surveyed himself in the glass, and decided he would create a better impression for some small attentions to his toilette. He had a wash, and brushed his hair, and re-arranged his tie. Then he looked at his watch again, and sallied forth briskly to meet his fate. His heart sank a little as the office hove in sight; almost he determined to stroll to the end of the street before entering. Subduing the weakness, however, he walked boldly in and waited for one of the young gentlemen behind the counter to perceive his existence.

It was some minutes before this consumma-

tion was attained, but at last a clerk lounged forward, and inquired if he wanted anything.

"Is Mr. Brocklebank in?" said Frank. "I have an appointment with him." He tendered his card. The clerk took it and disappeared. Frank contemplated the place, wondering if he was destined to become familiar with it, and listened as in a dream to the rattle of the traffic outside.

"Will you come this way, please?" said his messenger, returning. Frank started, was again horribly nervous, and followed him to the interior with pale cheeks.

"Sit down," said Mr. Brocklebank. "I must just finish this letter, if you don't mind."

The letter took some time, and the young man was at liberty to pursue his reflections once more. He decided he would be happy with a hundred a year, and listened apprehensively to Mr. Brocklebank's first words when at length the silence was broken.

That the result was a foregone conclusion the reader is aware, and there is therefore no reason to chronicle in detail the conversation that ensued. Frank took his leave with a strong sense of elation. Mr. Brocklebank's manner to him was condescending, but kind, and it was arranged that he should assume his new duties at the commencement of the following week.

The boy sprang on to a 'bus, and hurried off to Mayfair to tell Mrs. Bouverie of his good fortune.

She was alone when he was shown in, and he thought he had never seen her look so lovely.

"Well?" she exclaimed, eagerly.

"Oh," he said, "it's all settled, and I can never thank you enough for what you have done."

"What I have 'done'?" she repeated, quickly. "What do you mean?"

"Why, mentioning me to him, and letting

me know of the vacancy," he answered; "it was awfully good and nice of you."

"It was nothing at all," she answered; "I am delighted to learn the result is satisfactory. Let me hear all about it."

He accordingly recapitulated the interview, and once or twice she smiled inexplicably, he fancied.

"I suppose," she asked, "you will bring your sisters up to town now, and you will all live together here?"

"Yes," he replied; "we shall take rooms, of course, and it will be quite comfortable. Will you come and see us sometimes?"

She laughed. "Oh, yes," she assured him. "I will come and see you sometimes, and you must bring the girls to see me."

She had an idea of asking them to come and stay with her later, and trying to get them married; but it was unnecessary to say as much to their brother.

"When do you begin work at the *Hyde Park?*" she inquired.

"Monday," he said. "I don't suppose that Marion and Christabel will be able to leave Threegates so soon as that, but they can follow me. I shall take the rooms before they come up."

"I hope you mean to be very steady and industrious?" she said. "I take a great interest in you, and Mr. Brocklebank is a friend of mine. You would make me feel very guilty and uncomfortable if, after introducing you to him, he were to complain to me that you were idle, or anything like that. Now, do not look indignant!"

"I am not indignant," he responded; "I am hurt that you think so badly of me. I assure you that even if I were not ambitious for my own sake, I should work like a nigger for yours."

"Mine?" said Mrs. Bouverie.

"I mean to do credit to your recommenda-

tion," he stammered, perceiving how much more of the truth he had spoken than he had intended. "It is not likely, after you have been splendid enough to help me, that I should give your recommendation the lie. I am not a cad—honour bright."

"You are, on the contrary, a 'brick,'" said she, adopting his own phraseology. "Don't think I want to preach to you. I want you to like me, and I know boys hate to be preached to. I trust you; and you and I are going to be very good friends—'chums,' as you would say. Let us shake hands on the compact."

He thought he could always forgive her calling him a boy for a repetition of the delightful privilege. The touch of her slim, soft hand thrilled his arm, and made him giddy. He wondered afterwards why it was so much more intoxicating than the hand-clasp in meeting or good-bye. She had said she wanted him to "like her"—he left her presence

more wildly, more hopelessly than ever in love. During the ensuing days he thought of her almost continually ; her image mixed itself up with his prospects and everything else. The girls, who were overjoyed at the success which had crowned his application, supposed his demeanour was occasioned by Mr. Brocklebank's acceptance of his services. They thought him anxious to begin.

"Go back to town," said Marion to him, "and take your luggage with you. We will arrange everything here, and you can have the apartments in readiness for us when we join you."

He did not need pressing on the point. To be in town was to be near Constance ! He hired a bedroom in Keppel Street, Bloomsbury, and took her advice as to the locality most desirable for a permanent address.

After a good deal of trouble, he secured three rooms, which he thought would suit,

in Hampstead, and the day after this had been effected he was due at the office.

On this, his second appearance there, he was introduced to the sub-editor, with whom he was to sit, and the gentleman explained to him something of his duties. Frank was disappointed to learn how puerile they were. He had looked forward to writing descriptive articles, and seeing himself in print within twenty-four hours of the ink drying. Instead, he saw that nothing was expected of him but to be intelligent, and profit by the environment in which he found himself. He even marvelled how the performance of such things as he was set to do could be worth a hundred and fifty *per annum* to the proprietors, and he conveyed an idea of his disillusion to Mr. Brocklebank.

"What I supposed I was engaged for," he said, "was to write."

"Ah," said Mr. Brocklebank, "everybody writes; we needn't have paid you a salary

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for that. Keep your eyes and your ears open, and in six months or so perhaps we will let you try your hand at a 'par.'"

Frank was shocked at the lightness of the editor's tone in dealing with such a sacred thing as Journalism. Nevertheless, Mr. Brocklebank meant to be, and was, consistently good to him.

"I want to shape you, my boy," he told him one day. "You shall try your wings as soon as Jessop tells me you are fit"—Jessop was the "Sub"—"but there is a lot that I, personally, have not the opportunities to do for you. Get on the right side of Jessop—*he* can do more at the present stage for you than anybody else. He is a thirsty soul, and a drink or two will go a long way with him. And don't be afraid because you aren't earning your salary at present—you'll be more valuable by-and-by."

Marion, when Frank recounted this incident

to her, observed that Mr. Brocklebank must have taken a tremendous fancy to him when they met. "He likes you so much that he doesn't mind you being inexperienced at first," she said. And, later on, she and Christabel, retiring for the night, agreed how very prepossessing their brother's manner was.

They were now properly installed in the Hampstead apartments, and Frank, who often used to get home from the office about six o'clock, would take them for rambles over the Heath, which has some very beautiful "bits," as the painters say, though the general idea is to conceive it given over to "roundabouts" and whelk teas.

By going through Church Row and across the interlying burial-yard they were able to reach one of its most picturesque points in a few seconds; and sometimes, at night, Frank would light his pipe, and stroll out upon the heights alone, to meditate upon the woman he

loved, and on the novel that he intended to commence. It was somewhat rash to attempt a novel while he was not yet considered competent to contribute to a paper, but the notion was suggested by Mrs. Bouverie, and it had been fermenting in his brain. It would be magnificent, too, to mention to Jessop, who slightly patronized him, despite the drinks they now discussed at an adjacent buffet, that "Messrs. So-and-So are bringing out a thing I have done in the last few months." It would startle him; and Brocklebank would stare and begin to appreciate him at his worth. The boy smiled grimly at the picture. But finer and grander than all was the thought of laying the book in Constance's lap, and watching her read the dedication. He had composed several dedications already, and in none of them could he express befittingly one half of what he wished to say.

CHAPTER VI.

He began the *magnum opus* as soon as the intoxication of the idea had simmered into something resembling a plot. The hero, it need hardly be said, was Frank Heath, and equally, of course, the heroine was named Constance. When he returned from the office now, it was to swallow a hasty meal, and retire to his own room, where, with the toilet-table for a desk, and a view of the opposite tiles for inspiration, he abandoned himself to the laborious ecstasy of composition.

Having hitherto attempted nothing but verses and sketches, he found himself at some loss to

determine the length of the book, and he decided to take counsel of Jessop, to whom, under the ban of secrecy, he confided his intention.

It was not without much struggling that he had brought himself to relinquish his project of astonishing that gentleman with the news that the work was written and accepted, and he was therefore the more incensed when Jessop laughed.

He commenced the avowal naturally by an affectation of idle curiosity.

"When a fellow writes a novel," he remarked —"say a fellow who isn't known—I suppose the shorter he makes it, the more likelihood there is of a publisher being willing to produce it?"

"Eh?" said Jessop, looking up from his "Notes and Comments" column. "What's that, youngster?"

"I say, the shorter it is, the greater chance it stands of being brought out, I suppose?"

"What being brought out?"

"The book—the novice's novel."

"Oh, the shorter the better, certainly."

"Because it is cheaper to print?"

"No; because he'll have wasted less time."

Frank flushed, and shifted in his chair. He was correcting proofs, an odious occupation which he was beginning to understand.

"Why do you ask?" inquired Jessop, laying down his pen and staring at him vacantly. "Proposing to astonish the public yourself?"

"And if I were," Frank demanded, "what then?"

"Oh, it would be a brilliant idea," rejoined the elder man, with a guffaw, "nothing more. You think of writing a novel, do you? Ho! ho! When are you going to start?"

"I've started already," rejoined Frank, hotly; "and we needn't go on talking about it. Thanks for your information."

Jessop nodded, and proceeded to demand in characters only one degree more legible than his chief's how much longer the South-Eastern Railway was to continue to be regarded as a privileged buffoon, and when we should insist upon its trains carrying us at the same rate of speed as the trains of any other line in the kingdom. It was not until they adjourned to lunch that he recurred to the subject of literary aspirations, and then he delivered himself of a little homily, which left his hearer limp and wretched.

The pith of it was that everyone's ambition was "rot," but Frank's was especial rot. Nobody wanted anybody's novels—that might be laid down as an obvious proposition ; but for a suckling and a babe to think the world wanted *his* was a form of vanity calling for severe correction.

"My lad," he said, "you don't know your alphabet, and you expect to make effects with

the language. The amateur's novel is the most painful, the most *jejune* and exasperating thing that human conceit has invented."

"What *is* an 'amateur'?" asked Frank. "I presume the best men wrote a first novel once, didn't they? What *is* an amateur?"

"An amateur's an ass!" said Mr. Jessop. "Dry up." He ordered a whisky and potash, and moistened his own eloquence. "You've come to us to learn journalism," he continued. "Well, since you ask me, I think you a huge fool for that, too."—Frank refrained from saying that he *hadn't* asked him.—"I think Brocklebank a huge fool for taking you. And your people, who allowed you to do such a silly thing, I think, were huge fools as well. That's *my* opinion of it all."

"Your opinion apparently coincides with Carlyle's," said Frank. "Everybody of your acquaintance, and outside it, seems a fool to you. Well, I must get in."

But he could not shake the influence of the Sub's discouragement off. That night he took out the few sheets he had already covered, and eyed them disconsolately. He was unable to resume the narrative. His phrasing suddenly looked to him awkward and bald. He reproached himself again and again for having broached the subject to the other ; so far from the confidence having served to assist him, it had daunted and thrown him back. He pitched the manuscript, with a groan, into the drawer, and wandered into the sitting-room, where the girls were reading.

" Not getting on, dear ? " asked Marion.

He sighed, and shook his head.

" It's no good," he answered ; " I have given the intention up."

" Oh, *I* shouldn't," said Christabel ; " *I* should go on with it. Why, what's the matter ? "

" They tell me at the office it is nonsense my making the attempt. They tell me I

am an idiot ever to have fancied I could succeed."

"Well," said Marion, "it's easy enough to call people idiots, and it's difficult to write a book. But I suppose if everybody who has written a book were knocked over when everybody who hasn't, and can't, called him names, we shouldn't have many authors in the world."

"I daresay," replied the young man, wearily; "but the fact remains that the pluck's all shaken out of me."

Christabel tossed her paper on to the floor.

"Just you pull yourself together again, then," she cried; "and show the wiseacres how mistaken they are. Go on, Frank; do. What will Mrs. Bouverie say? You will disappoint her awfully."

"I will take her advice," he answered. "If she still thinks——" He rose and filled his pipe. The thought of "disappointing" Mrs. Bouverie was the bitterest part of his despair.

He went to her house the following afternoon, but she was out, and his pain deepened. He turned from the door, and threaded his way through the maze of private streets with chin sunk upon his breast. She was "out:" the word said much to him. It reminded him of the difference in their positions, the difference which, with the effervescent enthusiasm of his youth, he had yesterday hoped to bridge by his achievements. *She* was driving, visiting, or perhaps dining with friends, among men who paid her attentions. *He*, with ink-stained fingers, was trudging to Oxford Circus to save a penny on the 'bus fare—a man without a future.

He was still picturing her the centre of a fashionable crowd and gaily forgetful of him, when he reached his lodging; and, going upstairs, his heart gave a leap to find her chatting with his sisters in the parlour.

"Ah, Mr. Frank!" she said; "how are you?"

He told her he had been to call upon her; he tried to tell her what delight it gave him to find her where she was. But he could never tell her anything of what he wished the most to say; the subtle perfume that he always felt was left by her glove upon his hand seemed to mount to his brain and bewilder him, so that he was faint, and breathless, and impossible.

"I am going to lecture you," she cried, "directly. I hear you are having the impudence to be despondent."

"I am not very radiant," he acknowledged. "It was about that I wished to speak to you."

They were having tea, tea on a japanned tray on the dinner-table, and he took her cup, and brought her the sixpenny cake, and waited on her. When she got up to leave, and the hand that was bare was gloved again, he fastened the buttons for her. Christabel, who was a girl, concealed a smile as she watched him.

Marion, who was a woman, suppressed a sigh.

"Come a little way with me," said Mrs. Bouverie; "will you? We can talk things over."

She had arrived in a hansom, but she did not look for a cab as they strolled up the road; indeed, they were bending their steps in the direction of the Heath.

They sat upon a bench. A valley was below. The sun was sinking, and the yellow of the gorse merged into the green. From the landscape, which stretched for miles before them into tree and sky, the light was fading. Here and there a nursemaid and her charges made for home.

"You mustn't feel bad," she said. "I am so sorry people have discouraged you. I am sure you'll get on if you persevere."

"When?" he muttered. "How long? I want to get on *now*, and I don't—I can't!"

"You must be patient," she declared, gently; "you have only just begun. It is unreasonable to repine so soon."

"You consider me a coward!" he said, with a gulp; "and I'd have done anything in the world to make you—proud of me. You don't know, you can't think, what dreams I built on the book. I longed—yes, *longed*—to bring it to you, and hear you say that you approved. It was the hope of your approval that made me commence it. What can I do when a man of experience—a man who is an authority—advises me, in the plainest language, not to touch the thing; when he ridicules me—calls the attempt idiotic conceit?" He rested his chin on his palms, gazing gloomily into the distance, seeing nothing.

"*I* believe in you," she murmured. "Go on with it for *me*."

"Mrs. Bouverie?" His face turned pale.

"Yes," she said, "I do; Frank, I believe in

you! You poor boy, I understand what you're feeling now as well as you."

"You know?" he stammered; "you understand? Oh, how good and sweet you are!"

He thought she meant she understood he hoped to marry her. And she—momentarily she was at some pains to understand herself. She was sensible of a strong compassion, a defined desire to aid him, but mingled with such sentiments as these there was, for a second, something subtler and newer; something that perplexed her, and made her unfamiliar to her own perception, and puzzled by the oddity.

They looked at each other in an instant's silence, and then she rallied and rose. They walked back into the streets together; he felt as if he had been about to clasp her in his arms, and she had eluded him. The return to her ordinary tone struck a chill to his heart.

When Mrs. Bouverie found herself alone in a hansom again, driving westward, she gave a

little laugh which was hardly spontaneous. She said to herself: "How sorry for him he made me feel. What I wished was that he was a girl, and I could put my arms round his neck and kiss him on the cheek."

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER the encouragement that Frank had received from Mrs. Bouverie he became red-hot, so to speak, with excitement. He walked home feeling as if he trod on air, with his head held very erect.

Everything seemed possible to him now. He walked faster and faster, his young blood leaping through his veins, and his face burning. Sentences and epigrams which he meant to write danced before his eyes ; he was eloquent by turns—at any rate, in thought—with piquant and sarcastic and philosophical and cynical and witty phrases, that would burst upon the world like a thunder-clap. He would make a name

for himself in a year or so, if not before. Jessop, who ridiculed his project, should see that the youngster he had laughed at wasn't a fool after all. Fame! How glorious it sounded! What a goal for which to strive, through which to win —HER.

He knew she believed in him. She had told him that she believed in him. Her words rung in his ears: "Go on with it for *me*." Go on with it! He laughed aloud in his rapture. No power on earth should deter him now—no disapproval, no jealousy. He started as the thought came. What a fool he had been! Jessop was jealous of him. Ha! Ha! Jessop should have cause to be. He determined to write such a novel that well-known authors would congratulate him, and that publishers would be glad, positively glad, to take his work.

As he entered the sitting-room of their Hampstead lodgings, he experienced a thrill of gratitude for his sisters' never-ending kindness

and thought for his comfort. It struck him afresh and more forcibly than ever that they kept their sweetest smiles for him, and that they hid their own regrets for the comforts they had lost so well that a casual observer might have thought they actually enjoyed the change of existence. They had laughed, on their arrival, at the lodging-house furniture, at the rickety chairs, and at the inevitable shelves, and the tea table, and the painfully bright blue and crimson hues of the cheap carpet, and at the round table, and the maroon rep curtains, and the cheap white lace ones, which the landlady eyed with pride in their cleanliness.

But in a few days the room was completely transformed. Marion and Christabel were not without experience of the shops where the inexpensive and artistic muslin may be bought for "$4\frac{3}{4}d.$" a yard—where pretty Japanese and other articles of use as well as ornament may

be had at phenomenal prices. The great thing, they observed laughingly to Mrs. Bouverie, was to avoid hurting the feelings of Mrs. Clark, the landlady, who was a kind-hearted woman. However, by dint of much diplomacy and many smiles, the terrible antimacassars and the most glaring of the monstrosities were gradually done away with, and replaced by others which were as much in harmony with the room and each other as possible. The girls draped the pots of ferns and the palms they had brought with care from the Rectory, sacrificing their silk sashes for the purpose. Christabel, who was by no means an indifferent artist, painted two little tables and several stools, which anyhow looked pretty, even if they were rather weak about the legs. Her *chef d'œuvre* was a set of panels for the door, painted on American leather, representing mischievous and happy Cupids in various light and easy attitudes—such as sitting securely on clouds, and dancing on flowers, and

flying about indiscriminately, albeit possessed merely of a head and a pair of wings. The Parisian lamp shade of soft pink and white crimped papers shed a warm glow over the table, and as Frank looked at his sisters in their pretty gowns, he realized that he had much for which to thank Providence.

"How nice you have made the room look," he said, going up to them, and kissing them both affectionately. "It is really quite artistic. One would scarcely think it was the same wretched place that I took a few weeks ago. You have done wonders."

"I am glad you like it," Christabel said, putting her fingers caressingly through his hair. "Mrs. Bouverie thought we had quite taken away the lodging-house look."

"We may not have to live in lodgings much longer," Frank said, jubilantly. "Wait until I am a successful author."

Christabel laughed, and patted him on the

cheek. Marion gave him a keen look, but said nothing at the moment.

"You have made up your mind to take my advice," Christabel cried gaily. "Of course you will succeed if you don't get down-hearted. Every author must have his dark hours, and at one time or other has been made miserable by the jealousy of others."

"Mrs. Bouverie advised you to go on, didn't she?" Marion asked presently.

Frank's eyes sparkled. "She gave me the kindest encouragement possible. If it had not been for her telling me that she believed I had talent, I should have thrown the whole thing over. As it is, I am going on in spite of every obstacle that may be placed in my way."

"Mrs. Bouverie is a clever woman," Christabel remarked, nodding her head gravely. "She would not have said so much as that unless she really thought it. Would she, Marion?"

"No, I don't think she would."

"It was so kind of her to speak about my painting," the younger girl went on, enthusiastically. "I shall go to that place to-morrow."

"What place, Christabel?" Frank said quickly, emerging from his own thoughts.

It appeared that Mrs. Bouverie had been struck by the colouring and vigour of Christabel's flowers and Cupids, and on hearing that the girl not only loved the art, but could work very quickly with little to guide her in the way of copies, she had very delicately hinted that it would be easy to get very fair remuneration for painting on enamelled articles and screens from one of the big shops which supply such things.

Christabel expressed herself so delighted with the idea, that Mrs. Bouverie had promised to call for her the next morning and to drive her to the place where she frequently bought things for herself: taking with them the best of Christabel's efforts.

Frank frowned, and remarked that he did not like the idea of his sister painting for shops.

"Oh, but all that sort of thing has gone out now, dear," Marion said gently. "Years ago a gentlewoman could not earn any money except by being a governess, but the times have so changed that anyone with a little talent and perseverance can do something, and in our circumstances it will be very beneficial. Christabel will not deteriorate if she manages to make a few pounds to spend on a new gown."

"Besides, it will be something to do, Frank. If I am at all successful, it will make me so happy," Christabel said, waltzing a few steps round the room.

"Of course it is very kind of Mrs. Bouverie, and of you too," Frank observed, doggedly, "but we are not starving yet, and, although I have no right perhaps to say anything, still I must candidly confess that I don't like the idea. Now if you went to a School of Art and studied

for the Academy, there would be something in it."

"My dear boy," asked Marion, "have you any conception of what that would cost? We cannot afford to pay money now, we must make it." She did not intend any reproach, but she meant to make him understand that their life was not a bed of roses. They had sacrificed themselves before, and they would do it again, but they would lose no opportunity of helping themselves and him whenever one occurred that entailed the loss of caste. They were not the sort of girls to live contentedly on their brother. Then, there was always the contingency of his marrying some day. He was very young yet, but it was only natural that he would marry as soon as he had a decent income: and a man would be more than human who would amiably and contentedly keep two sisters in addition to a wife.

She herself contemplated writing children's

stories which she had been accustomed to tell in the Threegates schoolroom as a special treat now and then, and had already approached a publisher, who had known Canon Heath, upon the subject. But she had fully made up her mind to say nothing about the matter unless she succeeded, and even then not to Frank for the present. It would be time enough when his novel was finished.

A little later Frank went into his room and surrounded himself with paper and pens and a Shakespeare, and a Tennyson, and a Nuttall, and a Webster's Dictionary of Quotations. He was still young enough to think that a liberal sprinkling from the classics and from great writers gave tone to a book, or at any rate revealed that the author must of necessity be a *savant*. He was not very well up in Shakespeare, but he meant to improve his knowledge, and to learn some of the great speeches by heart.

He looked over his notes and re-wrote his first chapter, which, curiously enough, contained a thorough analysis of the character of Frank Heath—that is to say, as Frank Heath knew himself—but soon, however, as he came to his heroine Constance, his pen dropped from his hand. He leant back in his chair and fell into a blissful reverie, going through his acquaintance with Mrs. Bouverie and repeating to himself the first words she had said to him, and as many others as he could remember. Her beauty and fascination seemed to him before that of all other women; the colour of her eyes and hair were perfect, he said to himself. Then in fancy he actually had the audacity to kiss her, and the mere thought of it made him blush as if he were a girl. Poor young man, he was very young! Would the time ever come, he thought, when he might put his arm unrebuked round her beautiful, supple waist, and tell her how he adored and worshipped her?

The clock struck eleven at last, and with a start, he realized that the result of his four hours' labour was simply a few pages of re-copied manuscript.

CHAPTER VIII.

The next morning Frank went down to the office, with the full intention of giving Jessop a Roland for his Oliver. He went through with his usual routine in dignified but amiable silence, and then, as there was half-an-hour before luncheon, he went so far as to compose a paragraph upon the subject of the domination of Music Halls over the Theatres, and the growing taste for Variety entertainments, and left it carelessly where he knew it would be seen.

It was a busy day at the office. That week's issue of *Hyde Park* was to be specially strong. A new paper, built on similar lines and

substantially backed, was about to make its *début* the next day, Wednesday, which was the publishing day of *Hyde Park*. Mr. Brocklebank's mettle was aroused on account of one or two attacks made upon his paper by some evening contemporaries, who accused it of dulness and want of vitality. He had, therefore, been constantly at the office for the last three days, and had secured two or three articles from exceptionally gifted journalists.

Determined not to show any resentment for the snub he had received, Frank asked Jessop to lunch with him. "I am too busy for eating," was the somewhat irritable reply, "but I don't mind a whisky and potash by-and-by."

"I wish I could help you," Frank said earnestly, "but I won't bother you now. I don't suppose I shall be more than a quarter of an hour, and perhaps something may turn up easy enough for me to do."

Jessop gave him a swift look. He was perfectly conscious that Frank must be smarting under his rebuke, yet the young fellow had spoken so naturally, that he could not find it in his heart to be sulky. When he caught sight of Frank's neatly-written sheets, he ran his eye over them hastily. "He is not half bad for a youngster," he muttered, and he told his chief so when he next saw him. Mr. Brocklebank knew that Jessop had an ineradicable contempt for all amateurs, especially when they erred on the side of youth; as a matter of fact, the "Sub" was the moving spirit of the office, and no one recognized this more than the Editor, although he did not consider himself bound to proclaim the truth very forcibly. Between the Editor-in-Chief and a "Sub" there is a wide gulf fixed; the duties and responsibilities are so different, and the talents required so opposed to each other, that a man who fulfils the one *rôle* well would

probably fail in nine cases out of ten to fulfil the other.

"You think he shows some promise, then? I am glad of that. The lad's straight enough, I believe, and as he has lost his father and has two sisters, it is imperative for him to succeed in due time. I will look this over."

Mr. Brocklebank put the manuscript into his pocket, but it is doubtful whether he would have remembered it had he not received a letter from Mrs. Bouverie asking him to luncheon the following Sunday. He knew that she would wish to hear some encouraging news of her young *protégé*, and she was not a woman to be put off by mere generalities. The solidity of her cheque by way of premium gave some grounds for her expecting a slight return, and as yet the Editor knew perfectly well that he had simply left Frank to Jessop's tender mercies, and that, too, without any particular recommendation.

He wrote a letter accepting Mrs. Bouverie's invitation, and when he had sent it, he read Frank's paper carelessly. Although his own critical powers were considerably inferior to those of Jessop, he could see that the sentences were well turned, and although perhaps a little crude, and unmistakably a first attempt, there was considerable merit in the writing. Touched up by an experienced hand, the article would do for the paper when they were short of copy ; but he made up his mind that he should not tell the boy so yet, or he might get too uppish.

For the next few days Frank wrote a great deal—going to his room directly after tea and writing for several hours. The girls were each busy in their own way—Christabel's painting now being an organized affair, thanks to Mrs. Bouverie's assistance, and Marion having received an encouraging letter from her friend the publisher.

When he had written and re-written the first six chapters, he took them with him to Mayfair one Saturday afternoon. Mrs. Bouverie received him with a charming smile, and said that she was all impatience to hear him read his work. Her words always caused him to believe in himself, and, indeed, thrilled him with intense happiness. "His work"! It sounded like success already.

He cleared his throat nervously, and read out, like the narrator of "Happy Thoughts," "Volume I., Chapter I." When he came to the heroine he paused for a moment. At first he had called her Constance, but on reflection he changed it to Muriel, remembering that he would read it over to *his* Constance, as he called her to himself.

Mrs. Bouverie smiled, and drew her chair a little further back, where the lamp-light could not fall on her face.

"Poor boy," she thought. "I had no idea of

this. He has exalted me into a guardian angel. It is very sweet; but I am sorry he is so very young."

"I congratulate you, Mr. Heath; I like your phrasing, and you have hit on an interesting plot. The public always likes the record of a man's or a woman's career, provided it be not too egotistic. You will introduce some more characters, won't you?"

She had been on the point of saying that he had, as usual, fallen into the vein so habitual with young authors, and that he had modelled his heroine upon an edition of herself. But the words stopped in her throat as she saw the rapturous light on his young, ardent face. She was not a flirt, and she was not a woman who compelled every man in her circle to make love to her. Her nine years of seniority made her feel old enough to discard the usual conventional conduct that is natural to a man and a woman when there is the possibility of marriage

between them. But, being a woman, she could easily tell when friendship had ripened into warmer feeling, and, in Frank's case, she knew that it was a cruel thing to win the boy's first love under the guise of an elder sister's sympathy. It had not been her fault; she could not help knowing that her personal attractions were great; she could not hide her delicate complexion or the radiance of her large hazel eyes, or the sweet tones of her voice; but she resolved to do her best to let this young man see the utter hopelessness of his love as well as she could, without either hurting his feelings or letting him think that her friendship had in any way cooled. So, when he looked up shyly and asked her if she thought it would do, she told him with conviction that it certainly would.

"It is difficult to speak positively until you have got on further, you know," she added, with a smile. "You must work hard at it, and

get in plenty of incident. There is a capital groundwork at present, and I feel confident as to the result."

And then she talked to him in quite a businesslike manner, giving him excellent advice, and unconsciously making poor Frank more her slave than ever, because he realized that besides all the trouble she had taken for him, and the interest she had shown in his sisters, there was a kindness and intelligent sympathy in her which he might never find in anyone else ; and sympathy means so much to a young writer. At that moment he would have sacrificed himself with keen enthusiasm for Constance Bouverie. The cruellest torture would scarcely have appalled him, provided she knew he endured it for her sake.

The footman brought in the tea with some little hot cakes, and, fearing to weary her with too much of himself, Frank talked of Marion and Christabel, saying how indefatigably they

had tried to make the rooms look home-like, and how good they had been to him always.

"Yes, you are very fortunate in having such charming sisters. I was thinking so the other day when I called on them, and how dull they must find it now. In Threegates, of course, you knew everyone, and you had your own position; but in London one feels swallowed up."

"When one's ancestral halls are comprised in the luxurious phrase, 'lodgings at Hampstead,'" said Frank, with a laugh.

"Ah, but you won't be in lodgings in Hampstead for ever. When people speak of the successful young author, Frank Heath, he will be living in a comfortable little house somewhere; and in a few years the little house may be changed for a big one."

"If it were not for your encouragement I should never get beyond the lodgings, I am afraid."

"Of course you would. You have got something to say, and in spite of yourself you will have to say it. But to return to your sisters. I am giving a little afternoon party in about a fortnight, and you must all three come. Christabel has such a pretty voice that I shall want her to sing. Will you give your sisters my love, and say that I will send them a card as soon as I have fixed the date?"

"It is very kind of you—very kind indeed. The way you have taken us up, and bothered yourself; there is not another woman living who would have troubled herself half so much. It is a difficult thing to talk about," poor Frank went on, trembling beneath the fear that his feelings would lead him to commit himself and thus lose all his chances. "But I want you to know that I think you the most perfect woman I have ever met, and I owe you a debt of gratitude that I can never repay, not if I live to be a hundred. Please don't think that I am

only saying this on the spur of the moment. I shall never change my opinion, even if I fail utterly to fulfil all your kind predictions."

And then as he rose to say good-bye, somewhat abruptly, he stooped and very humbly and very respectfully kissed the white hand she held out to him.

CHAPTER IX.

"BUT, my dear, our frocks!"

Christabel let the card flutter to the table, and fronted her sister with questioning eyes.

"Our frocks!" she repeated forlornly; "how *can* we?"

"Our frocks are quite all right," said Marion, with an air of decision. "I have been thinking it over. For one thing we are in mourning, and nothing elaborate would be expected. For another, Mrs. Bouverie wouldn't have asked us if she thought we should feel underdressed. She knows we can't appear in *confections* from Worth just as well as we do! Come, don't be a silly; it will do you good to go out, and do

me good too. I shall answer this afternoon, saying we shall be very pleased."

The invitation to the "little afternoon party" was just delivered, and had indeed created something like a panic. For all her semblance of composure, Marion had not been guiltless of certain tremors herself when she drew the awe-inspiring pasteboard from the latest novelty in envelopes. To live in cheap apartments, and to go to a reception in Mayfair, is an incongruity calculated to strike terror into the bravest of feminine hearts, for cheap apartments and Mayfair fashions are seldom found in company. She, too, had inwardly gasped "Our frocks" in a moment of agony; she, too, had mentally cast a "wild, misgiving eye" over the contents of the upstairs cupboard. In women self-possession is primarily the work of the milliner. A chorus-girl dressed by Felix will bear herself among duchesses as if she were one of them; the daughter of an earl in

a gown from Westbourne Grove will feel bashful at the Mansion House.

The girls knew each other *au fond.* Christabel clasped her pretty hands behind her back, looked the other straight in the face, and nodded three times.

"You are a humbug, darling!" she said. "In the black, black depths of your mind you are as scared of cutting a figure as I am, only you won't admit it."

Marion laughed.

"Perhaps I am," she acknowledged, "but that will simply make me take additional pains with myself—not stop at home! Besides, really and truly, you know, we should never have been asked if it were to be a big affair. She has far too much good taste for that, has our Mrs. Monte Cristo! To refuse because we fear that the people there would sneer at our "get up" is to give her credit for less tact than a school-girl. Now, isn't it?"

"Ye—es, I suppose it is, if you put it that way."

"And we should hurt her feelings if she guessed the reason."

"Possibly we might."

"Which would be both rude and ungrateful!"

"Marion," said Chrissie, "you are a gadabout as well as a humbug. I will remonstrate no longer; I wash my hands of you. Write and accept this minute, and on your own head be it."

Once the note was posted, both began to look forward to the event in store for them with pleasurable anticipation. Since they had been in Hampstead their life had been sufficiently quiet to make anything in the shape of a party a bewildering excitement. Excepting a curate of the church they attended, and his prim little sister, none of their neighbours had condescended to notice them, nor did the Stir-

lings themselves call very frequently, though, when they did, Marion had more than a suspicion that the young man did not find Chrissie's society disagreeable.

The Stirlings were of good family, but in the most straitened circumstances. A curate's stipend is not a very substantial basis on which to found an income. A pittance of their own the brother had refused to touch or share from the day that his sister's intended husband was drowned on his way home from Australia. The engagement had lasted for eight years, and the poor little woman of two-and-thirty was completely prostrated by the shock. When she recovered she set herself a task from which she had never shrunk—that of hiding her sorrow from the world, and of trying to make lighter, so far as she could, the griefs of others. Her brother idolized her, and there was scarcely a poor person in the parish who did not owe gratitude to her for some cause

or other. Something in Marion's face had attracted her from the morning on which she saw her first in church, and she had made it her business to call on the Heaths. But all her attempts to enlist them in the work of the parish failed; and when Miss Stirling heard of the life they had led at Threegates, and of the life they led now, she understood it was kinder not to intrude on them too much. On an average she looked in upon them once a week, and once a week Marion and Christabel, in their best hats, returned the visit. They drank tea and discussed "Shakespeare and the musical glasses," and the respective merits of the local shops. The High Street was best for this, and Belsize Terrace for that, and Fitzjohn's Parade for the other. And what nice florists there were in the neighbourhood, had they noticed them? They had noticed them —they were charming! It was blameless, colourless, dull; dull even for Christabel,

towards whom the curate would look occasionally with fascinated eyes, mutely confessing adoration. Marion, for whom he had no eyes, was often bored profoundly in the first stage of their acquaintance. It will be seen that a formal invitation from Mrs. Bouverie came to them as the Ball to Cinderella, as the manna in the desert, as the sail to Robinson Crusoe. Yet they had had to hesitate because of gowns! Who would not be a man when a frock coat and an evening suit will take him anywhere? Who will withhold sympathy from women for being obliged to spend a thousand or two a year on clothes? Only husbands—brutes without compassion.

The girls looked very nice after all when the day came. Some girls do, whatever they put on. And, as it turned out, Mrs. Bouverie was as simply dressed as themselves.

"I am so glad you are punctual," she said, welcoming them, and then turning to Frank

with a smile. "I told you an early hour on purpose, so as to get you all to myself before the others arrive. By the way, Mr. Brocklebank was here the other afternoon, and he gave me very good accounts of a certain young gentleman. Although you do not see much of him, he knows exactly how you are getting on, and I believe—only it is a secret, so be very discreet—that an article by Mr. Frank Heath will appear very soon in a number of the *Hyde Park*, subject to certain modifications and editorial cutting. I congratulate you in anticipation."

Frank flushed hotly, and tried to look indifferent.

"I had no idea; it was merely written in spare time one day. I suppose Jessop must have seen it, but he never said anything to me."

"Jessop is the sub-editor, is he not? Mr. Brocklebank has it now at all events; and the public will have it very shortly."

"How delightful!" cried Marion and Chrissie in a breath. "You are doing wonders for so short a time, Frank."

"And it is all through you," Christabel added, squeezing Mrs. Bouverie's hand affectionately. "You are a perfect fairy godmother, excepting that you are much too young to be a godmother. *Fairy* godmothers, though, perhaps *are* young; are they?"

"I give it up," said Constance, laughing. "Now tell me what you are going to sing this afternoon."

"I shall never have the courage!"

"To tell me?"

"No, no, to sing of course. Oh, Mrs. Bouverie, don't ask me!"

"Well, we'll see about it. I don't expect a crowd, you know; there'll be no occasion to be nervous. Look at your brother: there's an example for you! With an article on the point of seeing the light, and a novel to follow (with

the critics all sharpening their pens), he preserves his composure still. How is it progressing—*the* book—well?"

"I'm getting on with it quickly," he answered, "too quickly, I'm sometimes afraid. The characters are beginning to talk for themselves now; you understand what I mean? I don't have to think what so-and-so's opinion of a certain subject would be; so-and-so is a person who thinks for himself." He ran his fingers through his hair, and his sisters looked at him as if he were Thackeray. "It is very curious the way one's characters develop themselves after a little," he pursued. "At the commencement they are so wooden and so stiff—just names, and then by degrees the breath seems to get into them, and they live. That is why I should never care to work at short stories. Before your names can come to life in a short story the curtain falls, and the show is over."

"Cannot the great novelist give life to his 'names' from the inception? It would be finer art still. You open the book, you turn a page, and lo, the character is before you."

'It would be very good," he said dubiously, "but at all events *I* could never do it. I have to warm up to it; I find the best written parts I have done so far are those in which my pen has run away with me. Of course I revise and correct tremendously, but even before I make my alterations they seem the best done. Do I talk about my method a great deal considering I am only at the A B C of literature?"

He found his "method" a very pleasant topic, as do most young artists, and was relieved when answered in the negative. If the footman had not opened the door and announced Captain Lingard, of the Queen's Musketeers, and Mr. Valentine Fairs, an A.R.A., it is doubtful where it would have

landed him, since he was at present at that stage in art in which one discovers one's views chiefly in enunciating them, and contradicts oneself epigrammatically twice every five minutes. The newcomers, however, gave a more impersonal turn to the conversation. A few moments later the door opened again. The room began to fill, and the company perforce divided itself into groups. The fragrance of tea was in the air ; there was the hum of voices, and from time to time the ripple of a laugh. Papucci played a solo ; a woman's roses fell from her waistband, and in the hush their drop to the carpet was heard. Everybody surged to the Italian and congratulated him. He shook his long hair, and deprecated his performance in terrible English. There was more laughter, more chit-chat. The white stockings of footmen circulated more freely. Mrs. Bouverie perceived that Captain Lingard had taken a seat by Marion, and was gratified

by her glimpse of them. The scheme of providing the two girls with suitable husbands had long been simmering in her head, both for their own sakes and for her *protégé's*. Though the ties between brother and sisters were of the strongest, she knew that nothing hampers a man more than having to support his relations in the early part of his career; on the other hand, if his sisters were happily married, it might be of as great an advantage to Frank as to themselves. It will be observed that the interest she had taken in him was not a caprice, but that she had determined to remove every obstacle from his path with all despatch. Papucci was going to play again. There was a stir in the room. The footmen effaced themselves; people changed their chairs so as to be nearer the piano. Captain Lingard and Miss Heath, however, seemed content to listen where they were. A most successful afternoon!

CHAPTER X.

MR. JESSOP'S opinion of Frank had been steadily improving since the day when he perceived that his snub had been taken in such perfectly good part, and, indeed, without the least trace of resentment. He went so far as to invite Frank to a luncheon at Pagani's one day, in a burst of amiability, combined with a feeling of wealth, which the unexpected repayment of a "fiver," lent in a weak moment to an impecunious journalist, had occasioned.

Over their coffee and cigarettes Mr. Jessop told Frank that he had worked very satisfactorily, and that, with great application and

perseverance, he fancied that he ought to turn out a good "all-round man" in time.

"Do you mean," said Frank, "that it will be years before I can do anything really good?"

"I don't know about years," the sub-editor answered, "but everything takes time, you know." His utterance was a little thick—he had satisfied his incessant thirst pretty generously that morning. "You can't expect to get a ten years' experience in as many weeks or months," he went on, "and take my word for it, you want all that to show any real grit as a journalist. A rough diamond is of no use in civilized society until it's both cut and polished. And a man may have plenty to say on a variety of subjects, but he has got to learn how to say it in order to ram it down people's throats; and it wants hard ramming in these days, and plenty of it. There is no harsher critic, as a general rule, than your man of

superficial education, who depends upon his newspaper for his knowledge. He is hard and bigoted, and he has not the wide views and the power of judgment which early association with clever and refined people always gives, or which is gained by thorough intellectual training. Thirty or forty years ago all the papers were written for the minority. All that kind of thing is impossible now. Now mind this, my dear young friend, I am not advising you to pander to the masses, nor to swallow all your convictions (if you have any), but the secret of worldly success and of popularity lies in the amount of tact that a writer possesses. Technical knowledge is, of course, more or less essential, but it does not go for much without experience. A young writer is like a woman, impulsive and burning hot, or icy cold; he wants to roast all his enemies, or professional adversaries, at a slow fire one minute, and to hug them to his bosom with sublime self-sacri-

fice the next. Now I suppose that you want to shy the decanter at my head?"

"Not a bit," said Frank, laughing. "I am taking it all in 'through the pores,' like Joey Ladle."

"Have another cigarette and then we'll move on. There is a lot of work to be done before six to-night.'

As they were driving back to the office, Jessop said, "By the way, what about that novel you were talking about the other day, and which I have no doubt you have commenced already?"

Frank started. "I have commenced it," he said.

"Of course. I guessed as much. Now, if you were to work on at it for the next six months, and then put it by for five years, and keep your eyes and ears open meanwhile—good Lord! when you read it again, you'd either burn it or re-write every chapter. There

are far too many youngsters in every walk of life trying to run before they can walk; but in the literary world they jostle you at every corner. Look here—but I will stop if you like; I am not speaking personally."

"I should not mind if you were, because I could not help feeling that you are only stating absolute facts."

"I am not given to exaggeration," Jessop said, a little testily. "You are exceptionally reasonable for your age, or I would not have said things that, though undoubtedly true, might possibly offend you. But here is the simple fact"—he slapped his knee emphatically with his open hand—"you can't enter the Army, or the Navy, or the Church, or be called to the Bar, or become a doctor—you can't even be a carpenter, or a shoemaker, without passing your examinations or serving your apprenticeship. In heaven's name, why should you not do one or the other in the profession of letters,

which requires a clearer head than any of them?"

They had reached the office by this time. As Frank was taking off his coat, Jessop paused in the act of opening some letters that had arrived by the two o'clock delivery.

"I don't get on that tack again in a hurry," he observed, with a short laugh. "Now I have had my say. If you have got nothing to do next Friday, I shall be pleased if you will come round to my rooms. Two or three men will be there, and you will probably hear some rather interesting conversation."

"I shall be delighted to come," said Frank. "It is very good of you to ask me—as I am such a youngster," he added, slily.

"Why, Tom Mansell's coming, and he is not more than five-and-twenty. I daresay you two will hit it off very well."

"Mansell, the artist?" Frank asked, quickly.

"He draws in black and white, and in time

no doubt, will be one of the best men of the day."

"Then I met him out at dinner last week," Frank said quietly, chuckling to himself.

"You did? Then you met a devilish clever young chap. He is on two of the best illustrated papers, and got back from Africa last month."

"Jessop would have been rather angry if I had said that Mansell's career rather upset his theories," thought Frank, as the sub-editor settled himself down to work. "Well, after all, exceptions prove the rule, and I am going to be an exception if I can."

It happened that on the day of Jessop's party, Marion and Christabel had received a friendly little note from Miss Stirling, asking them to go round in the evening to meet two young cousins who had arrived unexpectedly from India on the previous day. They were discussing this when Frank came home somewhat earlier than usual. Christabel ran to open the

door to him, and remarked, with a laugh, that she supposed he had been a good boy that day.

"Very good," he said, catching her round her slim waist and kissing her. "So much so that I am actually going to old Jessop's rooms to-night. He is giving a party, and your brother is to be one of the illustrious guests."

"Just fancy," said Christabel, looking at Marion, "that old bear asking you after his rudeness the other day."

"Not exactly the other day," Marion remarked gently; "it was quite three months ago—soon after Frank went there. Mr. Jessop has had time to discover that Frank is not a mere idler, amusing himself with literature."

"But a budding novelist and a promising journalist," answered Christabel, with a mischievous laugh. "Why, he occasionally has paragraphs in that celebrated chronicle of fashion and society and general news, *Hyde Park*."

"If you chaff me too much," Frank said

gravely, "I will smear those roses that you have been painting so elaborately."

"Don't touch them, there is a darling boy; I have been slaving hard all day. We had better send a note to the Stirlings, and say we cannot come, Marion; I am rather tired."

But when Frank heard of the invitation, he insisted on his sisters accepting it. "It will do you good," he said, putting an arm round each of them, and giving them an affectionate squeeze. "I can leave you there on my way to Jessop's, and Stirling will bring you back, if I am too late to do so myself. I shan't feel selfish then."

So it was arranged, and with the pleasing consciousness that he was not leaving his sisters alone, Frank betook himself to Charlotte Street, Russell Square.

He was the last arrival, for the other men all lived in London and had not far to come. The room was so full of smoke that for a moment or

two he could not distinguish Jessop himself. As his eyes became accustomed to the haze, he saw Mansell and three other men besides his host.

"Here you are at last, Heath, my boy," said the latter, with a kindly nod. "I began to think that you had changed your mind. Here's a chair. You know Mansell, I think."

"Any relation of the late Canon Heath, of Threegates?" asked a short, stout man, who was smoking a large German pipe with the face of a fat lady in ringlets on its china bowl.

"He was my father," said Frank, quietly.

"I am sorry for your loss," the other said kindly. "I was at Brazenose with your father. We met but rarely afterwards, I am grieved to say. He was one of the noblest-minded men I ever knew."

Jessop introduced his young colleague, and Frank discovered that the stout man was the dramatic critic to a leading daily, and considered

one of the smartest journalists in London. The others were a dramatic author of considerable repute, and a novelist who was also proprietor of a monthly review.

Various subjects were discussed, from evolution, electricity, the situation in Africa, to the solvency of a theatrical lessee, the impending collapse of a magazine, the proprietors of which declined to receive contributions from any but Cabinet Ministers and members of the Peerage —at any rate so some of their contemporaries declared,—the actor-manager question, on which the dramatic critic and the author got into a hot argument, and the peculiar fact of the longevity of one great class of politicians in contrast to the short lives of their rivals.

Mansell drew Frank aside and asked him how he was getting on with his novel.

"Pretty well," he answered ; "I hope to get it out next November."

"You are tolerably young," the other re-

marked frankly, "but that is no drawback if you know what you are about. Why, I wrote for the papers myself before I was nineteen."

"I had rather you said nothing about it to anyone, especially to Mr. Jessop, if you don't mind. He was very down on me the other day on the score of writing before I had had sufficient experience. Of course he calls me only a youngster," he added, laughing.

The other joined in the laugh as he offered Frank a cigarette.

"He is a surly old bear, I know, but there is a lot of genuine kindness underneath that surliness. He did me a good turn once when I was hard up, he lent me a 'tenner' and gave me a thundering good introduction to the editor of the *Illustrated Times*—Macdonald—who is a very old friend of his. I don't mind telling you that he went further than that. I was on the point of making a fool of myself for life, and old Jessop convinced me that I was an ass. It

takes a pretty clever man to do that with an obstinate, hot-headed boy."

"I can fully appreciate all you say," Frank answered warmly. "It is really through him that anything of mine has appeared in *Hyde Park*, and lately he has let me do some of the reviews. At first, you know, I imagined that the Chief was the Alpha and Omega of the paper, but if I had to depend on him alone, I am morally certain that I should have done nothing but correct proofs for years."

"I'll tell you what," Mansell said, as they were on the eve of departure, "I have got an idea about your novel. Would you like a few sketches in it? Say a frontispiece, and so on. If you would, I will do them for you with pleasure."

"It's very kind of you to think of it," Frank returned, gratefully, "of course, your sketches would be a great attraction to any novel."

"Well, look me up," said Mansell, giving him

his card ; "you will find me at home any Sunday, and I shall always be glad to see you."

"Good-bye," said Jessop, as Frank shook hands with him. "I hope you have not been bored," he added, drily.

"I have enjoyed myself immensely, Mr. Jessop, and it was very good of you to have asked me."

"I thought you might as well get acquainted with some good men. I am glad you didn't attempt to argue with Percival and Morris, they wouldn't have stood it, you know."

"I may be more or less of a fool," Frank said, a little indignantly, "but if I were such a consummate ass as that, I should deserve hanging."

"If I hadn't felt pretty sure of you, I shouldn't have asked you," Jessop said, giving him a slap on the back.

Mansell walked with Frank as far as the Marble Arch, where the latter got into a cab. As he was driving home, he pondered over the

fact that first impressions were not always to be depended upon. At Mrs. Bouverie's dinner, he had not been favourably impressed with Mansell, but to-night they had fraternized intimately, and he made up his mind to take the first opportunity that presented itself of introducing the artist to his sisters.

CHAPTER XI.

"Curzon Street, Mayfair,

"May 14th, 189—

"DEAR MR. HEATH,—How is that I have not seen anything of you for the last three weeks? No doubt you have been very busy. I was delighted to see your article on the 'Pessimism of To-day' in *Hyde Park*. It is a splendid subject, and a clever man of five-and-thirty might have composed many of the sentences. But how is the novel going on? Will you come to see me on Saturday at three o'clock and bring the manuscript with you? I am writing to ask your sisters to go with me to a

concert to-morrow, so you will certainly feel your ears burning in the afternoon.—With kindest regards, believe me, always sincerely yours,

"CONSTANCE BOUVERIE."

The receipt of this letter made Frank feel slightly uncomfortable, recognizing, as he did, that he was certainly guilty of having broken through the compact under which he had arranged to call once a week at Curzon Street.

Not that he had been neglecting his work and felt ashamed of owning it to the woman who had helped him so very much more than he knew or even guessed. But his friendship with Mansell had grown very quickly, and the last three Saturday afternoons had been spent in the music halls.

The first time that Mansell had asked him to go, Frank had not liked to refuse, fearing that if he pleaded another engagement he would scarcely be believed by the other. And when

the next Saturday came round, he found himself in the same predicament.

"I should like to go immensely," he said with hesitation; "but the fact is, I have a kind of engagement—"

"Then take my advice," the other said, decidedly. "I have had more experience than you; leave her alone. Don't go. You are too young to know how to manage a woman."

"I didn't say it was a woman."

"You didn't say the sun was shining either; but it happens to be shining at this moment. I want you to come back with me afterwards; some fellows are coming to dinner, and we'll have some fun."

Mrs. Bouverie felt a little hurt, but being a wise woman and pretty good reader of human nature, she determined not to let Frank see it. After three Saturdays had gone by with no signs of him, she wrote to him, and Frank with trembling hand answered her letter by return. He tore

up the first two sheets before he was satisfied, and at last read his third effort with a sigh of relief. "Dear Mrs. Bouverie," he said, "Thank you very much for your kind letter. I shall be delighted to come on Saturday, and I will bring the manuscript, although I fear you will be very much bored. I am rather in a dilemma upon one or two social points, about which I must not make any blunder. I wanted to have seen you ever so much, but I did not like to trouble you.—Believe me, always your grateful FRANK HEATH."

The next day was Wednesday, and the rest of the week went on leaden wings. When at last Saturday came round Frank hurried home from the office and spent three-quarters of an hour in arraying himself, and then got into a hansom. He awaited her in the cosy little ante-room that led off from the drawing-room, and wondered what she would say to him. The flowers in the vases were chosen with perfect

taste and harmony; the photographs on the mantlepiece and one or two of the little tables were of her friends and of some of the leading musicians and artists and prominent politicians and other celebrities. Frank smiled as he thought of a certain "star" in tights and a very long train, and an attitude that the County Council would certainly disapprove of, whose photograph lay in a drawer of his dressing-table. He and Mansell had each bought one at one of the music halls, where the lady was making a tremendous sensation as the very highest kicker on the stage. Suddenly Mrs. Bouverie entered the room, and he sprang up expectantly. She was wearing a tea-gown of dove-coloured silk crêpe, with old Mechlin lace falling about it, and some bows and long loops of golden-brown velvet. A few daffodils were fastened a little way below her throat, and Frank was for a moment quite dazzled with her beauty.

"I am so glad you have come," she said, with

a smile, and giving him her hand. "We will have a good afternoon's work. I do not expect any one else, but in order that we might be uninterrupted, I have told Davis to say I am out."

"How awfully kind of you! I feel utterly ashamed to bother you so much," he answered, showing his admiration so unmistakably that she could scarcely help smiling.

"I assure you that it is the greatest pleasure, and if you do not wish to offend me you must never say that again. Don't you understand me better than that, Mr. Heath?" She was on the point of saying "my dear boy," but the radiance in his face prevented her.

"I do not know how to thank you, Mrs. Bouverie."

"The best way will be for you to begin at once from the point where we left off. Shall I interrupt you when I think it advisable to make an alteration?"

"Oh, please do; I am afraid the ball scene will sound very improbable and very crude. It will have to be all re-written and the language improved."

"That will be easy enough. Plenty of novelists alter a whole passage several times before they are finally satisfied with it. Now begin. I am all attention."

Frank cleared his throat and started.

His hero, as I have said before, was founded upon Frank Heath, modified, of course, according to the writer's imagination. He represented the kind of life that he himself would have led if circumstances had been in his favour. The rusticating episode came in, and various other escapades, all common to youth when unhampered and unfettered by want of money and other causes.

Mrs. Bouverie, under the guise of the heroine, played the keynote. The actual differences in their ages was altered so far, that three years

only were on the wrong side. She was the good angel, the guiding star of the Frank in fiction, the confidante of all his troubles and vicissitudes. During the first volume he was not exactly in love with her, his reverence was so great that he did not dare to throw himself at her feet. His feeling was much the same as that experienced by a young artist on his first view of the Venus de Milo. Two brief engagements and one or two entanglements brought the reader into the second volume, which was as far as the manuscript went.

As novels go it was distinctly good. There was no padding, nor was there any evidence of the desire to depict the daily life of people of whom he had had no experience. Neither dukes nor costermongers came into it, nor duchesses, nor actresses. "The Career of Gerald Ingram" was a story full of impulse and probability, with here and there an ardent passage that carried you along with

it, and nailed your attention to the main theme.

"Of course you will re-write it all, or dictate it and polish it up and—so on," Mrs. Bouverie said thoughtfully. "I am certain that it will be a success: the style is spontaneous and very natural, without being at all dull. I should recommend you to go on straight to the end, then turn back, go through it all over again, and have it copied out for the publishers. You will notice many little faults that are principally the result of quick work. I suppose," she went on, smiling to herself, and turning her head aside for the moment, "that eventually George marries Marguerite?"

"Yes, he marries Marguerite, the woman who saves him from making a fool of himself, the woman who has been his good angel, and is worth all the other women put together. I want to paint her as one of those women who by their mere presence, apart from their person-

ality, compel even a young hot-headed fool to honour and respect them as he does his own sister—who seem to him the incarnation of purity and goodness and all that he reverences: not exactly his ideal, you know, because one's ideals are always impossible beings who would be absurd and unsatisfactory in real life. A good, true woman is not one of the wild self-sacrificing martyr-like beings that some people try to cram down one's throat. Do you think I shall succeed in creating the impression?' Frank asked, a little breathlessly.

"Undoubtedly," Mrs. Bouverie answered, rather drily. "Like David Copperfield's Agnes, she will be a type of good womanhood."

Frank looked up and saw her eyes fixed rather sadly on an engraving of "The Spring of Love," that hung just above his head on the right. It had been delicately coloured by an artist friend who knew Mrs. Bouverie's great liking for the picture. As an example of per-

fectly-matched people in years and in beauty and in sympathy, whose love and admiration are mutual and entirely inexplicable, because one of those intuitive perceptions that requires no explanation, "The Spring of Love" must ever remain a masterpiece to most young and impulsive natures—even to older ones it is a very pleasing picture.

As Mrs. Bouverie sat, a ray of sunshine fell across her head straight on to that of the girl, who is holding her flowers to her lover's face. Involuntarily Frank turned and looked at the engraving.

"Isn't it sweet? I am never tired of looking at it," Mrs. Bouverie said, softly.

"Rather too idealistic, though. I don't like the man in that get-up—it is neither one thing nor the other. It certainly isn't classical."

"My dear boy, for Heaven's sake don't get practical yet. Of course it is an ideal, and even I am not old enough to have lost all mine. I

hope I shall always have a few, or at least the love for them. That is an argument with regard to one of the modern great painters that irritates me beyond endurance. Because you cannot walk about the streets of London and Paris and see a woman of the face and carriage of one of his figures, does that prove that they never existed? Even if you could not discover an Eastern girl or a Sicilian quite so refined as he depicts them, what then? The drawing is faultless: they are the type—or the type to many people—of beautiful women, and if you refuse to accept them because they are not commonplace, you may as well destroy most of the old masters' creations upon the same principle."

Frank laughed. "You are quite excited," he said, looking at her with something very like adoration. She was very lovely then, with a curious light in her eyes, and a delicate flush that had spread over her face.

"As for that little thing, 'The Spring of Love,' I like it because it represents the most exquisite thing in life: the rapture that comes with the first great love—the love unsullied by any previous experience or knowledge; a love pure and unselfish, and all-absorbing on either side. It is the rarest gift from Heaven. Like mercy, it blesses the giver and the taker. The few who have experienced that love have found life here below a perfect Paradise—at any rate for the time being. But I should say that not more than ten out of every thousand people are so fortunate."

She stopped suddenly, and there was a little break in her voice. Frank was silent for a few minutes.

"I think I understand your meaning," he said presently. "You do not say that only one per cent. is capable of loving?"

"Ninety-nine per cent. are or may be capable of it," she interrupted. "The rest only have

their love equally returned, and are happy. To come back to yourself, don't try to fly before you can walk. Believe me, it is the greatest possible error. Cherish your illusions, and your ideals: you will be all the better for them. Want of belief and enthusiasm are sapping the vitality and the manhood of most of the present generation. They believe in nothing, they have little or no ambition; they are—or think they are—old men before they are thirty. All this is as bad in its way as injecting morphia or smoking opium, this detestable physical and intellectual anæmia. I'd rather be a savage dancing round a fire and revelling in cruelty and absurdity, but ready to die in the defence of my religion or my tenets, and possessing a belief which no torture could weaken.

"Indeed, I consider that many savages—as we call them—are far finer and nobler men than half those you see in London drawing-rooms: the former would scorn to do a mean action to

a friend, and would resent an insult to themselves or one of their family to the death. The latter have no friends, because they do not possess the requisite qualifications to retain anything stronger than a mere acquaintanceship, and so long as they can cheat without being detected, and win from others their dearest treasures, from a wife to a fortune, they are quite content, and apparently unconscious of their treachery, while the victims in most cases have not the courage to fight for their own.

"Don't think I am pessimistic, my dear friend. It is only the present young generation that disgusts me; the men of thirty and upwards are well enough. To tell you the truth, that is why I took such a liking to you, because you were still a boy, with your enthusiasm unchecked, your ambition still great, and because the vicious lives led by so many young men were apparently unknown to you. It would be one of the greatest sorrows of my life,"

added Mrs. Bouverie, earnestly, "if I thought you would be foolish enough to forget that you were the son of one of the most honourable men who ever breathed. I should have had no patience with a fool. Enjoy yourself as much as you like, but read your Don Quixote, and keep your honour bright."

"If ever I were unfortunate enough to offend you, it would be the bitterest punishment that could be given to me."

"It is very good of you to say so, especially after all this tirade. Have I bored you very much?"

Her handkerchief had fallen to the floor, and under the pretence of getting it, Frank flung himself at her feet.

"I would rather hear a lecture from you than the softest love-vows from any other woman," he cried, his voice shaking with emotion. "You are an angel, as far above me as if you were in heaven; and if I live a thousand years, I can

never hope to—to convince you that apart from all you have done for me, I would die for you."

He was only one-and-twenty, and very much in love with the woman who was some years his senior and his superior in position, and possessing much more worldly experience, therefore I think his living and dying in a breath may perhaps be pardoned.

Mrs. Bouverie showed herself his true friend. She took her handkerchief from him calmly and smiled.

"Thank you, my dear friend, very much," she said, gently; "but I would much rather you lived—not a thousand years, though—and achieved your share of literary fame. If I ever wanted any little return from you, I should get it amply when I read good criticisms on your work."

"Of course you don't believe me," said Frank, with a sigh, the torrent of love's eloquence

checked on his lips; "and I am so young, I know—"

"Not a bit too young to show what you are made of. I am prouder of your friendship than I should be of any protestations from a mere society butterfly, and we are firm friends, I hope?"

"For ever and ever," said Frank, getting up, with another big sigh.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR the next week Frank felt as depressed and miserable as if he were utterly alone in the world—without money and without hope. He went about his work mechanically, answered Jessop in monosyllables, kept out of Mansell's way, took a few more whiskeys-and-sodas than were good for him, and wrote two exceedingly tragic and harrowing short stories, in both of which the heroes died uncomfortable deaths. He began several letters to Mrs. Bouverie, in which he tried to set forth his feelings, and wished her to understand that he loved her as no man on this earth had ever loved before, or would ever love again, and that he would cheer-

fully immolate himself within her sight, and pray for her happiness with one worthier and more suitable to her than himself.

Various quotations adorned these letters, and he found Webster's Dictionary and Tennyson very useful; some phrase about "powers never yet called into being," that he recalled having read years before in some sensational story, soothed him very much, and had figured in most of the epistles; but, happily, none of them was despatched.

Marion and Christabel saw that something was wrong, but wisely left him alone. Both girls were working hard now. Marion had had three of her stories for children accepted, and Christabel received regularly, from a large furniture firm, a supply of articles for enamelling and painting. The money they each gained was certainly not much; but the two girls derived infinite pleasure in being able to buy so many things for themselves and for the house,

and they looked forward to the time when they would be practically independent. Marion guessed that Frank's griefs were connected with Mrs. Bouverie, but she determined to ignore the fact, and when Christabel once or twice wondered at his loss of appetite, and slightly resented his keeping away from them by taking long walks, or shutting himself up in his room for hours, Marion persuaded her to say nothing.

"I am quite certain that it is nothing to do with Mr. Brocklebank. The boy's working hard, and a slight worry is likely to aggravate itself into something great for the time being," Marion said quietly, one day.

"How do you know that it is nothing to do with the office? Perhaps he's offended Mr. Jessop."

"I asked him the question, and he assured me that he was on the best possible terms with both Mr. Jessop and Mr. Brocklebank. He has

written a good deal for the paper lately, and there will be a great deal of his work in this week's number."

"Well, then, he must be in love with some one," Christabel suggested, after a few minutes' silence.

"I am far from being certain you are right," Marion returned, with well-assumed indifference. She was engaged in watering their various ferns and palms which she had placed outside the window in the little enclosure which their landlady called the balcony. "He has been out a good deal lately with that Mr. Mansell, whom he is so anxious we should be civil to. Probably at one of the theatres or the music halls he has seen a chorus girl or a dancer, who, to his mind, combines the charms of Venus and Juno and the rest of the goddesses. Talking about it would only do mischief; he will laugh at his folly by-and-by—that is if it has any existence."

"I don't think he'd care about the kind of people you refer to," said Christabel.

"Nonsense, my dear child. At his age all young men rave over some actress or other; but at the same time, I know Frank too well to believe him capable of getting into a serious scrape. Fortunately, his writing takes up most of his attention."

"I shall say nothing more," answered Christabel. Truth to tell, she was a little piqued, and she painted industriously for some time.

Marion was sensitive to a degree, and she perfectly understood her sister. Nevertheless she went upstairs and busied herself in dusting and tidying the bedrooms. Frank's fireplace was littered with scraps of paper, and some that he had thrown there had blown on the carpet, owing to the draught from the open door and window. Marion picked them up and put them in the waste paper basket, and in doing so, she could not help seeing a few words here and

there ; "if only you would believe, my beautiful Constance, that my love is not an ephemeral —a mere boy—I can think of no one but you night and day—from the first moment when I saw you—sunlight on your hair and in your eyes—aroused feelings never yet called into being—"

As convincing proof that Mrs. Bouverie was the target at which these amatory phrases were aimed, an envelope, only half torn across, lay in the grate, with her name and address staring Marion in the face.

"Poor boy," she said, with a sigh. "It is just as I expected. And how like a man to leave such evidence about! The landlady and Sarah know Mrs. Bouverie quite well, and they might have found these scraps as easily as I." She gathered them all together in the grate, and then set light to them. When only ashes remained she tidied the room, and, meeting the servant girl on the stairs, told her to sweep up the fire-

place and clear it out. That done, she surveyed his writing-table and pushed the sheets into a little order without disarranging them.

"He'll get over it in time. She is a kind-hearted woman, if ever I saw one in my life, and she will let him down easily. Poor boy, he will be all the better in time for having loved—or fancied himself in love—with a good woman. Of one thing I am determined, and that is, he shall never know that I have discovered his secret."

While they were at dinner that evening Marion made a startling proposal. The girls had inaugurated late dinner in honour of Frank, not letting him know they took nothing but a make-shift luncheon, so that no additional expense was incurred, nor any extra trouble given in the cooking.

"Frank, dear, you have never brought your friend Mr. Mansell here yet."

Frank started. "He wants to come very

much; but I didn't know if you would like it," he said. "Not that I am ashamed of the place," he added, hastily; "no one could be, considering how pretty you have made it. I will bring him back with me one night."

"I am afraid we can scarcely ask any one to dinner yet. It would be wiser to wait until we can afford the luxury of an extra sitting-room. But if you like to fix a day next week, we can ask the Stirlings to come in with their cousins."

"Very well," said Frank. "I will go and see Mansell to-morrow. But are those all you propose to invite?"

"I don't know who else to ask," said Marion.

"Mrs. Bouverie," cried Christabel. "Surely we ought to ask her. She will certainly come if she is not engaged."

Marion hesitated. She did not dare to give Christabel a warning look, and if she had, the younger girl would not have understood it.

"You must certainly send her an invitation," Frank said, decidedly.

"Very well," said Marion, gently. "If you both wish it, I will write her a letter." The thought occurred to her that Mrs. Bouverie would have the finesse to invent a good excuse if she thought it advisable. But Mrs. Bouverie did nothing of the kind. The next Sunday she drove over in the afternoon, and said she would be delighted to come on the day in question. On Thursday morning a quantity of flowers and fruit arrived in a large basket, exquisitely decorated and filled with lilies and roses. Marion and Christabel busied themselves to their hearts' content the whole morning.

Soon after breakfast the landlady knocked at the door, and, on being told to enter, did so, with an air of mystery and importance combined.

"What I wanted to ask you, miss," she said, addressing herself to Marion, "is what are you

going to do about the refreshments to-night? If you let me know your wishes, I will do all I can to carry them out."

Mrs. Rogers was a good-looking woman, and trim and neat in her appearance. As she herself expressed it, she had lived as housemaid with the "quality" before her marriage, and now and then "gave herself airs"—at least, so her neighbours said.

"We can't do much, you see," Marion said, with a laugh, "having only one room to entertain in. Tea and coffee, and sandwiches and some fruit, are about all we shall aspire to, Mrs. Rogers."

"Lor', miss, that is just what I said to myself! I knew you would not be having of anything so vulgar as a sit-down supper. And how about the sandwiches?—ham, I suppose, and a little tin of tongue makes a most genteel little sandwich."

"To tell you the truth, Mrs. Rogers"—poor

Marion began to feel very uncomfortable, and Christabel hid herself behind the piano—"to tell you the truth, as we want them to be very thin and nice, we thought of doing them ourselves."

"You let me do them. I rather pride myself that there's very few as equals me. Some has talent for one thing and some for another. The best ham at two-and-six a pound, and a new quartern tin-loaf. I will send the girl out at once, and you shall have one or two this afternoon to see."

"It is really very kind of you, Mrs. Rogers."

"What I mean, miss, is that I don't need to be told what you have been used to all your days, and what you do have now shall be as good as it can be. The coffee, best Mocha, at one-and-ten, very strong, and a shilling's-worth of cream and hot milk for them as prefers it," Mrs. Rogers went on, breathlessly; "and it is warm for the time of year, so that ices——"

Christabel's pretty head appeared over the top of the piano. "Mrs. Rogers," she said solemnly, "you are a very kind woman, and your ideas are excellent"—the landlady beamed—"but ices! We should positively be ruined."

"Lor' bless you, miss, a quart of milk, half-a-dozen eggs, and some of those fine raspberries you've got there is all you need have," Mrs. Rogers cried, triumphantly. "I've got a most beautiful icing pail. I got it at a sale, thrown in with a hip bath and a turn-up bedstead, and I sometimes make ices for Mr. Schneider at the Violin Academy, when he has one of his musical evenings."

"You are really an angel, Mrs. Rogers."

"That little side table will come in handy," the landlady said, walking across the room on the tips of her toes, in what she deemed a most refined manner. "The coffee shall be ready at nine o'clock, and the ices when you ring for them. I never saw such a very elegant basket

as that in all my born days, and the flowers are that lovely." The good woman drew a long breath, and by degrees finally got back to the door, which she closed behind her safely.

CHAPTER XIII.

THANKS to Mrs. Rogers' excellent management, Marion and Christabel were able to give themselves up to entertaining their visitors without any feeling of anxiety, and Mrs. Bouverie complimented them with evident sincerity when she said that she had seldom had a more enjoyable evening. Christabel's singing was always worth hearing. Frank had an excellent tenor voice, and Mr. Mansell a ringing baritone that, in spite of little training, was equal to many a professional's. Then, too, he had a very quick ear and could accompany himself on the piano, and, as he was familiar with most of the well-known operas and burlesques, his performances

were extremely well received. One of the Stirling cousins recited "The Portrait," and an original composition which neither at the beginning nor end was very explicit; but as he knew how to act, and to make the most of a dramatic scene his hearers were not bored.

When Mrs. Bouverie left, the Stirlings also took their departure, and Mansell seized the opportunity to try to talk to Marion, for whom he, evidently, had keen admiration. Frank was at first very quiet. He did his duty as host, and talked to little Miss Stirling, and to one of her cousins, who was rather shy. Of Mrs. Bouverie he managed to keep tolerably clear, without any visible avoidance, although she, with her charming *bonhomie*, possessed the rare gift of making every one feel perfectly at ease, so that he need not have been under any apprehension. She was the life and soul of the room without in any way depriving the girls of their natural privileges; and, at last, poor Frank

vied with Mansell in paying her little attentions. It was too strong a trial to stand by and see another man engrossing her the whole evening, and Frank was too young to be able to hide his feelings very successfully.

When they were once more alone, he turned to Marion, who was shutting the piano, and asked her how she liked Mansell.

"Very much, dear. He is wonderfully experienced for his years, and he seems to have been everywhere, and to have seen everything."

"He is special artist to the *Illustrated Times*, you know. They sent him out to Africa. He knows Egypt, and Abyssinia, and Morocco, and the Cape equally well, and last year he went to Russia. A life like that brings a fellow up to the scratch."

"Very much so," Christabel said, rather dryly —for her.

"I like his voice, and his manner of singing,"

Marion remarked. "Altogether, Frank, you are lucky in your choice of a friend."

"Then all I can say is that I hope Frank will have very many friends by-and-by, who will not be such paragons of success," Christabel said, shortly. "Good night. I am tired, and it is half-past one."

"She does not like him," Frank remarked with considerable surprise. "I wonder why."

"Did you not notice his trying to drive Mr. Stirling into an argument as to the efficacy of missions, and the question of too much interference with the lower classes?—and, when that failed, he stuck to the teetotallers. I could scarcely help laughing myself, his remarks were so forcible and so witty."

"Didn't little Stirling like it? Of course Mansell was only chaffing—more or less. Both subjects have been worn threadbare."

"Even if he partly agreed, how could Mr. Stirling openly say so, considering that he is

himself a total abstainer, and that he works so much amongst the poor? You may do a thing, to set an example, that may be opposed to your own inclinations, but if you once let that fact be known abroad, the efficacy of your sacrifice is entirely destroyed."

"And Chrissie takes Stirling's side. Well, he is a very good little fellow, but I certainly thought Mansell would be a little more to her taste."

After the first pangs of grief had been lessened by time, Frank settled to work with renewed energy, and the novel made rapid progress.

Mrs. Bouverie had written to him since her last visit to Hampstead, and had returned the three chapters which, by her own request, Frank had left in Curzon Street on the—to him—memorable Saturday. Her letter was, if possible, kinder and more sympathetic than ever. She agreed with him that a woman's

knowledge was more or less essential on many of the points to which he had referred, and thus it was that she had ventured to make a few notes which she hoped he would find useful.

"There are very few English or French writers who understand a woman's nature as thoroughly as an analytical chemist does a patent medicine. In fiction this knowledge is invaluable, but in private life it is most undesirable. Those men can never be very happy in feminine society, because the veil through which a man views a woman—the veil which makes her beauty and her personality all the sweeter by reason of its suggestiveness and its mystery—is torn aside. They have nothing more to learn, nothing more to experience, no new sensations to be created; and, in my judgment, they are to be sincerely pitied. There is a great difference between knowing too much and being a fool. My dear Frank—if I may call you so—don't err on either side. Don't get your enthu-

siasm damped, as I said to you the other day. I know a man of seventy whose intellectual powers are gigantic, and whose strength is apparently unimpaired, and who can enjoy the charm of a pretty, fascinating girl as heartily as if he were twenty, without that *blasé* admiration that would make her shrink from him, unless she were one of those 'up-to-date' monstrosities. I once saw a famous Lord Chief Justice, who was perilously near his seventy-fifth year, roaring with laughter at the drolleries of the clown and the policeman in a pantomime, and I am sure that he wasn't a bit ashamed of it. Forgive me if I am boring you, but I could not help noticing the regret with which you mention your ignorance of women's conversation, and of feminine details generally. Believe me, you will write just as well despite the ignorance, even if you never dispel it. Study men in every phase possible to you, and let the other sex reveal themselves by degrees. Many of the

novels of the present day are so wanting in correct intuition! The women draw impossible men; they are either feverish or morbid, or hysterical, or else guardsmen, seven feet high, who lounge in drawing-rooms and flirt with every girl in the book by turns. Of course, there is the character dear to feminine novelists —the falsely-accused hero, whose inheritance is taken possession of by his brother or his rival, and who goes to Dartmoor in place of the real offender. Men, being less impulsive and more impartial than women, seldom give themselves away so completely. Men, on the other hand, often draw impossible women. Let each sex make a study of their own, and they will paint much more faithfully than the majority of the present writers of fiction.

"Let me know how you are progressing, and don't fail to count on me in every way in which I can possibly help you."

When Frank looked at Mrs. Bouverie's notes,

his heart swelled with gratitude. He at once recognized that if he took her advice his work would be considerably improved. Her letter was kissed several times, and an answer, teeming with appreciative gratitude, sent by return. Then, with a fresh incentive to work, he stuck manfully to his desk, and, after nearly a month's application, realized that he had approached his last chapter.

Marion and Christabel had been to see Mrs. Bouverie one Saturday, and, at her request, Frank had accompanied them. But other visitors were there at the time, and consequently the conversation was confined to general subjects. As Frank headed a fresh sheet of paper with chapter xxxv., and knew that it was the last, he felt that he ought to write to acquaint Mrs. Bouverie with the important fact, and ask permission to take all the fresh part over to Curzon Street the next Saturday. Her advice had been so valuable to him with regard to the

earlier part of his story that, however much he shrank from seeing her alone, he realized he could not leave her in ignorance of the rest of the work. And delay was useless; his love was eternal, he told himself; never should he be able to think of any other woman. Acting on this thought, he wrote, and received a cordial reply:—

"My dear Frank,—Come and lunch at 1.30 on Saturday, and we will have a long afternoon over the novel. I am most anxious to hear how it ends.—Always your sincere friend,

"Constance Bouverie."

He left the office early, and on his way purchased some beautiful Neapolitan violets. Jessop had been rather taciturn that morning, Mr. Brocklebank having been put out by an acrid paragraph in a rival paper, which lost no opportunity of sending a Parthian shaft at the *Hyde Park*. The fact was that there had been a little slip in the Society-news column, but, as

the rival said, with delighted triumph, if the paper which professed to contain more accurate news with regard to celebrities and social functions than any other fell into such an error, where is one to pin one's faith? Mr. Brocklebank had gone down to the office in a towering passion—instead of travelling down, as was his wont, to Eastbourne on Saturday morning. Everyone in the office felt the effect of the "chief" being upset, and Frank congratulated himself that he had not corrected the proofs of the Society-news column that week.

But Jessop stopped him as he was going out, and produced a copy of the paper of a fortnight back. "Look here," he said, pointing to the literary criticisms, "you wrote these three short notices."

"Yes, I did," said Frank. "You read them afterwards, if you remember."

"I glanced through them; the remarks were true enough, but don't you know that Aubrey

Plantagenet is a lady writer. Did you ever know a man assume such a name as that?"

"From the style of the writer I thought that the author was certainly a man," Frank observed, with some hesitation. "I read every word of it, and the knowledge it showed of clubs and theatres, and curious people—"

Jessop snorted.

"What rot you talk! A man would not make such an ass of himself—and a man doesn't make everyone of his women characters a Jezebel either. It is only women who are always heaving bricks at their own sex—or paving-stones if they can manage to lift them. There is no real information in the book at all. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that the woman who wrote the rubbish began life as a ballet girl at the 'Audacity.' She injured her knee, and had to look out for another profession, and so took to writing novels. That is the way the market gets overstocked. People who have

as much idea of expressing themselves sensibly and correctly as has a poodle, rush into fiction with the idea of making a living."

"I am very sorry I made such a stupid mistake," Frank said, earnestly. "Has Mr. Brocklebank noticed it?"

"Fortunately not—at present. But, as I told you before, a critic must not make mistakes. He has got to know everything—more or less; anyhow, he has got to convince other people that he knows everything, and if the people forget a mistake, a newspaper doesn't. You are painstaking as a rule—but take my advice, and keep your eyes and your ears open, if you want to succeed. If you ever feel uncertain, come to me. I had rather you did so a dozen times than that you made a slip."

Poor Frank went off rather sore at heart with things in general; but recognizing the fact that Jessop had spoken kindly to him, and had refrained from venting the irritation on him that

had been caused by the Chief's smarting sense of injury.

Mrs. Bouverie had a nice little luncheon ready for her *protégé*, and she produced some particularly choice wine, with which to drink the success of the novel. Frank presented his flowers, and she accepted them with the sweetest smile, assuring him that Neapolitan violets were her favourites. Then they adjourned to the little boudoir, and took their usual chairs, Mrs. Bouverie seating herself with her eyes on her pet picture, "The Spring of Love."

"I thought of having an illustration here?" Frank said, interrogatively, as he finished reading his best love-scene. "What do you think?"

"My advice to you is not to have any illustrations at all; the headings of the chapters may be prettily ornamented, but in a novel, except it be an *edition de luxe*, I think illustrations are a mistake. Of course, if you were to

have the book got up in the exquisite style affected by some French writers, nothing could be better. Madame Chrysantheme, on that thick white paper with those little gems of woodcuts or process-work is perfection itself; but that means money, my dear boy, and publishers are only human. By-and-by, I daresay, you may, if you choose, give your works to the public in that form; as it is, I recommend as plain a thing as possible."

"I will take your advice," said Frank simply; "but I first have to conquer the publishers," he added, laughing, pleased with himself to find that he could talk so naturally to her.

"Publishers," Mrs. Bouverie repeated, musingly. "Yes. There will no doubt be some difficulty there. I wish I could help you. But I don't know any of them."

"You will not, I think, misunderstand me," Frank observed presently, watching her delicate hands as she poured him out a cup of tea, "or

think me a young prig when I say that I want to fight the battle myself. I want to feel that this stuff has come out on its own merits—if it ever does come out—and without being pushed. One hears so much of interest; and, if you believe some people, no one can make his mark in the literary world without it. But I want to have a try by myself. I am prepared to meet with snubs and kicks all round, but I shall hang on till something happens. If failure stares at me from every quarter, I shall——" He jumped up and took the tea she held out to him.

"Yes?"—she retained her hold of the saucer, and looked at him, smiling.

"Put it all in the fire."

"You shall not leave me to-day until you give me your solemn word of honour to do nothing so idiotic."

And, of course, Frank gave the promise.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. RICHARD MANSELL was sitting over his studio fire one wet evening in April, smoking and thinking. And as he looked at the spluttering pine-logs and smouldering peat—which he burnt instead of coal in order to avoid smoke—a woman's face, in imagination, looked at him from the heart of the fire. His own face, by the way, did not wear a very pleasant expression, and, as he stretched out his long legs to their full extent, he kicked the fender once or twice impatiently. Ever since he had known Mrs. Bouverie—it was nearly a year, he reflected—he had made up his mind to do all in his power to marry her, and her possessions. There was a discrepancy in their ages, but she

never appeared to notice it, for he was old for his years. He fancied that he had made a favourable impression, and she certainly never failed to send him a card for every one of her parties, besides welcoming him on Sundays, and occasionally asking him to dinner. He had been very careful not to betray himself in any way, but he was useful as escort to private views, always sending her cards, and leaving her free to ask whom she pleased to accompany her. Of course she asked him, and was glad to hear his opinions and criticisms; the two were well known in the galleries among artists and celebrities, and no one thought of inviting one without the other. Thus, for several months, they met constantly, and Mansell was biding his time; he expected that his income would reach the respectable sum of 1000*l.* in the course of the next year, and he determined to wait until then before putting the question which would—he told himself—make or mar his

life. Matters were at this stage, when Frank appeared on the scene.

It was easy enough to see that Mrs. Bouverie had influenced Frank; the thing to be discovered was how far and to what degree Frank had influenced Mrs. Bouverie. Mansell felt tolerably sure that there was nothing to fear, but "one never knows in this world," and he did not like the Saturday-afternoon conferences. He knew nothing positively, but, after his first meeting with Frank at Curzon Street, Mrs. Bouverie told him a few particulars, and had herself suggested the idea of the novel being illustrated, intimating that she wished to bear the expense. She relied upon his—Mr. Mansell's—friendship for her to manage the affair with tact and delicacy. He immediately said that her wishes should be carried out to the letter, but that since he had taken a liking to the young fellow himself, he would be only too pleased to give him any assistance in his power.

"No;" Mrs. Bouverie had returned, with a laugh. "Business is business. If he has the drawings at all, they must be in your best style, and they will take up your time just as much as if they were an order from a complete stranger, or from one of the people whom you work for regularly; and you will let me know what I am indebted to you, unless you wish to offend me very seriously."

Mansell promised, knowing that Constance Bouverie was a woman of determination, but he considered it quite fair to carry off Frank on Saturday afternoons now and then, lest too frequent meetings should lead to dangerous results.

But lately he had been too busy to continue his *surveillance*. A few weeks before, some riots in Servia had attracted considerable attention, and a change of Government had seemed imminent. Mansell had received orders to start at once, and had to remain in the

Balkan Peninsula until matters had settled down peaceably, and this did not take place for more than a month. When he returned, he had to stick closely in his studio to finish off the arrears of other work that had necessarily remained neglected during his absence; and as he looked into the fire that night, tired out with want of sleep, he experienced the truth of of a fact that had been hovering over his senses ever since he had gone out to Hampstead to see Frank Heath and his sisters. Until that night it had not appeared a fact; it had merely been an impression. But it was nevertheless a fact that all the women and girl faces he had lately drawn bore a striking resemblance to each other, and their model was undoubtedly Marion Heath. He had never asked Mrs. Bouverie to sit for her portrait, though her face offered great facilities to an artist because of the constant change of expression. It had been a long-cherished wish of his to draw her in black-

and-white, and send the portrait to the Academy; but as yet he had not asked her permission to do so. Why had Marion Heath's face so persistently haunted him? he wondered. The features were clearly cut and very expressive, the mouth and chin beautifully modelled. It was a face that grew on certain people, and the look in the eyes was rather proud, but full of nobility and quick intelligence.

Mansell was a man without relations; not that I suggest for a moment that that was any disadvantage to him. "Go to strangers for help, to friends for advice, and to your relations for nothing," was very wise advice given by a very wise man. From earliest childhood Mansell had no recollection of love or kindness from parents or relatives. Money sufficient for his educational expenses was paid regularly every quarter to the school in Bedford where he spent all his holidays. Fortunately

for him, the Head Master was a kind-hearted man, and when Mansell had passed his fourteenth birthday, he summoned him to his library, and asked him if he had any idea of what he would like to be in the future. The boy happened to have some sheets of paper under his arm, and, as he hesitated for a moment, Dr. Webb held out his hand for them.

"Did you do these?" he asked, looking at the clever caricatures which covered the papers in every conceivable position—including one of himself in cap and gown, lecturing in his favourite attitude. "This answers the question at once: the boy who did these without instruction will be a clever artist one day. What do you say?"

The boy had answered that he should like nothing better. Whereupon the Head Master had communicated with the lawyers who acted as young Mansell's guardians, and asked

whether there were any instructions as to their ward's career. They replied that there was a sum of 2500*l.*, the interest of which they had paid in full each year for his maintenance. His father had been in the Civil Service, and had died in Madras when the child was three years old; the mother had come over to England, but her health was so shattered, that she only survived her husband a few months. By his father's will, in the event of his mother's death Mansell inherited the money when he was twenty-one. There were no further instructions whatever, and the mother had left her child's future to the chief partner in a well-known firm of solicitors.

Dr. Webb, the head master, thereupon undertook Dick's art education. He reasoned that there was no need to press him with classics or mathematics to any great extent. For the next two years the boy went to the studio of an R.A. who lived in Bedford. He was then sent

to Paris and Rome, and, at eighteen, he began to contribute to some of the minor papers. By this time his 2500*l.* were slightly lessened. At his majority, Mansell came into about 1800*l.*, but when he first made Jessop's acquaintance the greater part of it had vanished. Poor Mansell had reasoned that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. He had worked harder than most of the young fellows with whom he associated or whom he met, and so for a brief nine months he burned the candle at both ends. But his good training saved him. If a man can do his work thoroughly well ; if, in fact, he does it so well as to excite admiration even from the uninitiated, it is not often that he need starve. Competition is very great, and the only way to rise out of the crowd is to achieve better results than Tom, Dick, and Harry. There are exceptions, of course, as there are to every rule, but mediocrity is the demon that kills individuality, crushes out enthusiasm,

and produces a hopeless stagnation which is fatal to the growth of perfection.

Mansell was an enthusiast in his art. He had begun with black-and-white and stuck to it manfully, although one or two brother-artists had suggested his taking to oils as likely to prove more remunerative; but Mansell considered that there was room for a good deal of improvement in his own particular branch of art, and he meant to show his metal. There was a very strong vein of obstinacy in his nature, and, as is usual with such characters, the surest way to arouse it was by opposition. He was gathering together a collection of his best sketches, and, by-and-by, he intended to have an exhibition of them in Bond Street or Piccadilly. There were several portraits which he had not as yet shown to the world, and he meant to add to them from time to time until they formed a conspicuous part of the collection. Needless to say, Mrs. Bouverie was destined to

adorn it, if Mansell could manage to gain her permission. He had several unfinished sketches of her charming head and figure, executed from memory, but they were jealously guarded from alien eyes. As he sat and looked in the fire and smoked, Mansell thought over his life as it had been up to the present epoch. He was seven-and-twenty, and it was no conceit which told him he had ten times the experience of many men double his years; that he could give information of some kind or other to everyone with whom he chose to talk, and who cared to listen—information that was worth having. He had a memory as keen as a razor, and he often amused himself by sketching the faces of people he had noticed, or merely passed by in the street.

He was a well-built man, at once lithe and strong. Without being handsome, his personality was so striking that he attracted women far more than a mere Adonis-type of

man, and, had he chosen, Mansell could have married over and over again. Society belles and plain heiresses smiled sweetly upon him, but to no purpose. His colours were nailed to the mast, and he was not going to haul them down in favour of any others. Yet—what was the meaning of Marion Heath's face so persistently floating across his memory? He felt that it was absurd and annoying and unreasonable. He admired her, but he was not in love with her. She was too quiet and unemotional for him. His ideal woman was a combination of Psyche and Minerva—a creature of nerves and impulses, of quick, keen intelligence, passionate, hot-tempered, but sensible enough to yield when in the wrong. Constance Bouverie satisfied him in every fibre. Her beauty appealed to him in a different phase every time he saw her; she had as many moods as an April day, and in each of them she seemed more fascinating than any other woman. There

were times when she was all electricity, when her hair and eyes sparkled, when her very skin was bright with vivacity and energy, when her colouring came and went with each emotion, the quick, warm blood flowing swiftly through her veins. These were the days when Mansell loved to watch her, and contradict her, and puzzle her, and laugh at her, for the exquisite pleasure it gave him to see her lose her habitual self-control. Then he would beg for pardon with a gleam in the deep, dark eyes that belied his humility, and on more than one occasion he had provoked her to strike him quite sharply with her fan or her parasol. Yet they were the best friends in the world.

The point which Mansell was never sure about was whether—in her case—the feeling of friendship was strong enough to turn into love. But whether she loved him or not, he determined that it should go hardly with a man who tried to come between them.

He said this to himself, clenching his strong, white teeth while he did so. He meant to stand no nonsense, and if Frank Heath came in his way, he would have to look out for squalls.

CHAPTER XV.

FRANK had finished the first bit of genuine hard work he had ever accomplished in his life ; and he was prouder of himself than if he had produced half a dozen successful novels. He had re-written the whole of his MS., adopting each of Mrs. Bouverie's suggestions, and as he read and re-read passages selected at random, he felt that, apart from his own enthusiasm, it was an original and interesting book.

Marion and Christabel had been so discreet during these weeks of his laborious task, and so sympathetic and anxious in endeavouring—and succeeding—to make his home comfortable in every way, that he felt some compunction at

his silence, and so threw aside his depression at last.

He read his sisters the first chapters of his novel, after impressing upon them forcibly that although at the outset they might assume he was writing of himself, nothing was wider of the mark.

"I want you to understand thoroughly that I have not drawn anyone from life. Of course it is almost impossible to escape touches of one's surroundings; and peculiarities or sayings must strike one, and get reproduced unconsciously; but, although the hero is a young fellow who starts life on much the same basis as myself, and, in one or two respects, may be thought to resemble me, it is not so at all. You will see that as it goes on."

"Of course, dear," Marion assented, not glancing at Christabel, who was smiling to herself as she sketched with deft fingers a design of little Cupids for a fan. "I think you did

very wisely to start in that vein. The most popular novels are those which deal with a man's or a woman's life at its most interesting stages, and, if told in the first person, their personality seems so much more real to the reader. And then you get the inner self—the *ego*."

"I hope there is not too much of that," Frank observed, a little anxiously. "Mrs. Bouverie said at first that there were a good many soliloquies, so I took out several, and introduced more dialogue."

They listened with rapt attention, and, when eleven o'clock struck, extorted a promise from Frank to continue each night until the end.

"It is splendid," cried Christabel. "Victor Gray is just the kind of man I admire. Plenty of determination, proud on the right occasions, and never at a loss. I am so glad you have not made him an Adonis, Frank—a 'pink-and-white ladies' darling.'"

"Well," said Frank, "so far as I could I

wanted to make Gray a perfectly natural character."

"And you have succeeded," said Marion, with conviction.

Then came Frank's ordeal with the publishers. There are some recollections which one never outgrows, and as long as he lives Frank Heath will remember the morning that he walked with his novel — his first-born—wrapped in brown paper, and beautifully directed, out of that little Hampstead parlour to the post-office. Post-office! commonplace, prosaic, where the blotting-paper smears one's addresses, and the nibs are always crossed; what histories and complications, what anxieties and disappointments, fall into your boxes every hour! What a *Comédie Humaine* might not be issued by you, with every volume bulkier than your Directory!

He greeted Jessop cheerily, and entered on his day's work with a nervous exhilaration in

his veins that was new to him. Every now and again the consciousness of what he had done swept over him afresh. He consulted his watch several times during the afternoon, speculated when the parcel might be expected to reach Messrs. Pater and Noster's—for Pater and Noster were the firm he had finally selected—and, at four o'clock, he permitted himself to imagine it being delivered.

How soon, he wondered, might he hope to hear from them about it? A week—a fortnight—perhaps a month—must drag its weary length away before his suspense could be ended. And then very likely he would receive a line of rejection—he could hardly look for acceptance by the very first people to whom the MS. was submitted—that would be unreasonable. "Acceptance!" What a stupid word it sounded, as if a MS. were a thing that publishers received out of graciousness.

"You look uncommonly cheerful," remarked

Jessop, sarcastically—"anybody left you anything?"

Frank disclaimed a legacy, and, obeying an irresistible impulse, communicated the explanation. Certainly, he had always designed to keep the matter secret until it could be imparted with the greatest effect, but the temptation was strong.

Jessop grinned.

"Submitted it, have you? To whom?"

"Pater and Noster; they are a good firm, and I had a fancy for them."

"Poor devil," said Jessop; "I hope you won't have a headache till it's published."

"Thanks," said Frank, smiling. "It's very good of you; I hope I shan't."

"What is it?" inquired the other, after a pause —"three volumes?"

"I think so; it is intended to run to three volumes, but of course I hardly know."

"Glad to learn there is something you don't

know," said Jessop ; "let us hear when you get an answer."

Frank was sorry, as he made his way home, that he had not preserved silence on the subject as he had meant to do. Now, presuming rejection followed rejection, Jessop would know all abuot it, or at least divine his failure by the fact that the book was so long appearing.

Hope springs eternal in the human breast, however, and especially in the breast of the very young. By bed-time the author was confident again, and though in the ensuing days he had his intervals of depression, the outlook appeared to him, on the whole, quite promising. What had Marion said ? What had Christabel said ? Had not Mrs. Bouverie, who read all the best fiction of the day on both sides of the Channel, encouraged him to expect success ? Jessop was a journalist, and, albeit a clever one, not unnaturally inclined to disparage efforts in

the higher branches of literature, to which he himself did not aspire. Jessop should be confounded and apologetic. But it was really beginning to be time for Pater and Noster to reply.

When six weeks, and then two months, had passed from the memorable morning that saw the *Magnum Opus* despatched, Christabel declared the firm must certainly be entertaining the idea of its publication.

"Perhaps they considered the thing so awful, that they have even forgotten its arrival," Frank muttered.

"Nonsense," said Marion, while Christabel laughed. "Business people don't act like that. The worse a story was, the more quickly it would be sent back, I should imagine."

"Mine," said Frank, "is doubtless the happy medium, the unsatisfactory composition which they will take their time to return."

"Smoke," responded Christabel, snatching

up his pipe, "smoke, my friend, and be sanguine and good-humoured. Blessed man, to have tobacco! We women do the best we can with tea, but nothing seems to *mellow* the human heart like bird's-eye."

Frank consented to be comforted, and, puffing furiously, ultimately saw Fortune in the clouds.

"When it comes out——" he said, presently.

"Oh!" said Marion, "it's coming out, is it?"

"Yes," said Frank; "it's in the press at the present moment. When it comes out, I think I ought to have a copy specially bound to give to Mrs. Bouverie."

Both girls approved.

"With a suitable inscription," added Christabel.

"With a suitable inscription, of course. But I was thinking just now whether it wouldn't be better still to dedicate the book to her. I think I ought to."

"You would have to ask her permission," said Marion, doubtful of what that dedication might betray. "You would have to ask her permission, and perhaps it would be good taste to print only her initials for everyone to see."

Frank, whose romance had run to something poetic in the way of homage, was chilled.

"Perhaps," he agreed, reluctantly; "anyhow there is time enough to consider that."

"I wonder," mused Marion, "what you will get for it?"

"A hundred pounds," Chrissie suggested.

"It is little enough, in all conscience," said the novelist; "but for the first book——"

"Plenty of first books make fortunes nowadays," she rejoined. "Look at——." And she mentioned two or three titles to substantiate the theory.

"Fortunes for the publisher," said Marion; "not for the people who write them."

"And yet," said Frank, "if I were well

known in some other capacity, I might get advantageous enough terms, too. It is only necessary for your name to be familiar to the public for a publisher to kow-tow to you; the merits of your stuff are a detail then. If I had just been acquitted in a notorious murder case, and had been talked about for months by everybody in London, Pater and Noster would have answered me in three days, and offered me brown sherry and a cigar."

"My dear boy," said Marion, "these are commonplaces. You might just as well say that if I were a popular actress, I need not take any trouble in writing my little tales in order to place them in a sixpenny 'weekly,' with a picture of me at the top. In a nutshell, the public buys names, and publishers and editors are, before all things, men of business."

"And the world is 'an 'oller mockery,'" supplemented Chrissie, "and we are all three of us too good for it. Marion, if I am pressed,

and it's not too stale, I'll have a piece of the cake that's left."

Frank went to the sideboard and got it out, and then they produced one of half-a-dozen bottles of claret that he had discovered in Soho at a perfectly ridiculous price. They were a cheery trio, despite their misfortunes and affected pessimism, and Frank was again conscious how much worse off he might have been; how much worse off they all might be.

"Come," he said, "things are not so bad after all. The book may be taken; we are all together; and one of these days, who knows, we may be driving in our carriage. And Chrissie shall have a horse—'richly caparisoned.' I don't know where you buy 'caparison,' but if it's something-and-a-halfpenny a yard, she shall have it."

At this juncture there was a postman's knock at the street-door, and he stopped short, and listened.

"I won't go down," laughed Chrissie; "as surely as I do the letter is for the landlady."

"Hark!" said Marion; "they are coming up."

"For Mr. 'Eath, miss," said the little maid-of-all-work, holding the missive out.

Frank caught at it with his heart in his mouth. On the back of the envelope was "P. and N." He tore it open, and the lines danced before his eyes. There was no parcel, only the letter; it could only mean one thing.

"Well?" exclaimed Marion and Christabel, in a breath.

He passed it to them silently, and sat heavily down. Messrs. Pater and Noster thanked him for the offer of his story, which they regretted they were unable to accept. They were "accordingly returning the MS. to-day."

His castle in Spain had fallen about him with a crash. He felt twenty years older in a moment.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOWEVER, the next morning things looked better, as things have a habit of doing after a night's sleep. Frank wrapped the MS. up once more, and, acting on the principle of one who realizes that life is short, and the way is long, sent it off again without a day's delay. The publishers, he reflected, would waste enough of his time; there was no need for him to waste any on his own account.

He could not help wondering if the two young ladies in the little post-office remembered that the package had already passed through their hands, and guessed that it was a novel which had been rejected. He thought one of

them smiled, and he felt hot and uncomfortable, and, albeit it was very likely that he was distressing himself unnecessarily, it is none the less true that an unsuccessful author appeals to the majority's sense of humour very strongly; though why it should be so, Heaven knows! I think it is that, as a nation, we have very little respect for even success in literature. The literary man who fails seems as stupid and grotesque to us as a clown who cannot turn a somersault. Success is the only possible apology for the existence of either.

Of course Mrs. Bouverie had to learn of Pater and Noster's refusal, and the following Saturday afternoon saw Frank Heath again in her drawing-room. He affected a stoicism he was far from feeling, having tact enough to be instinctively aware how distasteful his goddess would find repinings.

"I am very glad you have submitted it somewhere else," she said. "I cannot say that I

expected to hear of acceptance so soon as this; though, inconsistently enough, I am disappointed—and confess it."

"That is what the girls say," he answered; "and, indeed, I might truthfully declare that, in cold blood, I looked for nothing better myself. All the same, it is a damper. One can't help asking oneself why, if it is worthy of publication, the first publisher should not be as likely to take it as the second or third."

"Well," said Constance, "we can always recall the fact that many of the most famous books we have, met with refusal to begin with. I don't pretend that this is an explanation, but it has its comfort. The explanation, I presume, is that publishers do not always know their own business; or, to put it more politely, even a publisher is not infallible."

Frank found it very charming to be consoled by her. There was a sympathy in her voice that she did not endeavour to repress, and,

momentarily, he almost found himself questioning whether, supposing his initial attempt to place the work had been successful, he would not have lost something of the delights of his labour.

This, however, was while he was with her. Away from her, he was not so philosophical: and there were evenings when, I am afraid, Marion and Christabel had a hard time of it.

The second firm to which the MS. had been forwarded were just as long in communicating as Pater and Noster had been, and the suspense told upon his nerves. He now began to perceive very clearly that his chances in life totally depended upon his succeeding in a literary career —there was absolutely nothing else for him to look forward to—and he was conscious, also, that most of the encouragement he had received had come from those whose opinions might easily be coloured by their affection for him—Mrs. Bouverie and his sisters—his

sisters and Mrs. Bouverie. Who else had faith in him? Mansell was very good-natured, and the offer of the illustrations had been distinctly amiable of him. But what did it amount to? Doubtless, he had reflected, even while he made the suggestion, that the book would never appear! As to Jessop—Jessop openly ridiculed his ambitions, and had told him that, if he kept the MS. by him for five years, at the end of that time he would assuredly tear it up. It was easy to attribute the sneer to jealousy while one was sanguine; but in depression it appeared terribly likely that it might be true.

The Sub, who pretty clearly guessed the state of affairs, had refrained from asking whether Pater and Noster had replied yet; but, one day, Frank voluntarily confessed the fact. He felt that the other knew it, and, annoyed as he was with himself for the burst of confidence which rendered the humiliation

necessary, preferred to acknowledge his defeat, rather than have it suspected it was too bitter to bear mentioning.

"Oh! by the way," he said, "you asked me to let you know what those people answered about the novel. It didn't come off there."

"Oh! didn't it?" said Jessop. "Where have you sent it now?"

"Brodie's."

"Brodie's!" said Jessop. "What on earth did you send it to Brodie's for? You'll get it back from there, as sure as a gun. They don't bring out three books a year that aren't reprints, and those are paper covers. With a three-volume society novel, you might as well have chosen a Bible-house."

Frank looked foolish.

"I always understood it was a good firm," he said; "one has known the name of 'Brodie' ever since one was a kid. Anyhow, it can go somewhere else, when they send it back."

"You may as well let it make the round," Jessop concurred; "you won't be satisfied until you have. But Brodie's!" he indulged in a short laugh. "Why don't you ask advice when you've got experienced men to give it to you?"

"I didn't know you regarded the attempt sufficiently seriously to spare any," sighed Frank; "if by 'experienced men' you mean yourself?"

"Do what I can, of course, all the same. After Brodie's, who's the next you mean to favour?"

Frank ran off a short list, and Jessop nodded. "They are all right. If you want my opinion, I don't for a moment believe that any of them will touch a novice's stuff with a ten-foot pole, but the names are right enough, and when you've tried all of them, I'll tell you one or two others."

Frank expressed gratitude—not very badly,

considering he did not feel any, and was in his first youth.

"I shall be much obliged for your help," he said; "it is really very kind of you, I'm sure."

Fulfilling the Sub's prophecy the ill-fated parcel lay on the sitting-room table when he reached home that evening, accompanied by a brief note. Messrs. Brodie said that "while the language in which it was written called forth the admiration of their Reader, the story was, unfortunately, not of that class of exciting narrative which was in demand by the public just now." Frank, who was intoxicated by the "Reader's admiration," did not know whether to be more grateful for the encomium, or disgusted by the fatuity of the objection. He wanted to know why Messrs. Brodie could not say: "We publish only shilling shockers ourselves," instead of pretending to answer for the taste of the United Kingdom. In the light shed upon him by Jessop's information, he was

sarcastic and mocking, and inquired of the girls whether it was to be feared that all the higher-class publishers, who did not deal in paper-covered sensation, would be putting up their shutters. But this was a good sign, for in the face of the previous rejection he had been simply speechless.

It is not my intention to detail Frank Heath's efforts to secure recognition step by step. Such a proceeding would be wearisome to those who have never experienced disappointments of the same kind, and equally unprofitable to those who have. Suffice it to say that, in the course of the next six months he had essayed half the publishing-firms contained in the list he had submitted to Jessop, and with never-failing constancy his first-born, his heart's joy, had returned to him after many days. The MS. was now getting dog's-eared in the first sheets, and loose as regards its fastening at the end. From time to time he

re-copied the opening pages, to give it the appearance of a virgin work, fresh from the author's hand, and secured it with the long brass clip afresh. He had ceased to despatch it on its fruitless errand by post, in view of the expense, and was accustomed to take it to the publishers' offices himself now, handing it in across the counter to the care of a variety of supercilious clerks, whom he eternally cursed for their demeanour.

It was telling on him—telling on him much more than the brief fits of depression, which had troubled nobody. His habitual manner was quieter than it had been, and the girls and Mrs. Bouverie noted the change with anxious eyes. He did not rail at fate, but he was acquiring the tone of one who no longer expects anything of it—always a distressing thing to hear, and especially distressing (when it is genuine) in the young. That a young man should be affected so gravely by the mere fact that his

novel is refused may seem an absurdity to many persons, but there was more than this in Frank's case. Position, love, bread-and-cheese itself, were to come to him from literature, if they came at all, and he was receiving, from all sides, what appeared to be the most practical proofs that he had no qualifications for it. It is not to be denied that he had cause for despondency.

Jessop had altogether discontinued his allusions to the novel; by a tacit agreement, the subject had been dropped between them. Mansell, who knew from Mrs. Bouverie what the state of affairs was, secretly congratulated himself. With all his admiration for her, he had a sufficiently low opinion of the sex—or shall I say, he was sufficiently a judge of human nature—to feel that nothing would kill her undesirable interest in her *protégé* so surely as for him to fail in making any progress. For himself, he still refrained from putting his

fate to the test—of endangering his very charming friendship with a charming woman by precipitancy—but he was not without a consciousness that, by infinitesimal degrees, he was advancing towards the haven of his hopes.

One evening, while Frank was walking towards Oxford Circus for a 'bus, the two men met. Mansell greeted him with the geniality which was so characteristic of him, and which meant so little.

"Dear boy!" he said, "I haven't seen you for ages. And how is the world treating you?"

"It isn't treating me at all," said Frank. "I have to pay for everything."

Mansell laughed cheerily, and clapped him on the shoulder: "What's the news?" he asked. "Anything fresh about the book?"

"Apparently not—the publishers don't seem to think so at all events."

"Hard lines!" said Mansell. "I wonder

you aren't tempted to chuck the whole thing up sometimes, and go out West, or to New Zealand, where a fellow isn't so cramped. A man has got breathing space out there, and a chance of making a fortune."

"Emigrate?" Frank looked at him wonderingly. "And my profession?"

"Oh, well, of course, one can't take one's profession to places like that; at least, a writing chap can't, but—I don't know—if I found it as hard to make headway in London as lots of fellows that I meet do, I think I should go in for something else. Take my word for it, there aren't many prizes in Literature at the best. Come and have a drink."

Mansell's seemingly careless words sank into the young man's mind. Emigrate! Presuming he could save the money, why not? He found himself recurring to the notion after the other had bidden him *au revoir*, and he was jolting on the omnibus towards the Swiss

Cottage. What room was there for him here, as the artist had said, in this crowded, bustling city? He did not think he could ever wholly throw aside his profession, but why should he not obtain a position as a journalist somewhere abroad? He might at once make more money and gather more experience. He would do no good in England, he was sure of it. His book would never be taken—never; and his fancies of one day making Constance his wife were ludicrous. He was a failure, a predestined, ignominious failure—the worst kind of failure, for he had been given help, and had not profited by it. And yet, oh, the blank, the awful sense of loss that would fall upon him, when he realized that Mrs. Bouverie and he had said good-bye, and that for years and years there must be thousands of miles between them!

The 'bus stopped with a jerk at the terminus, and he got down. The thought of "pastures new" was still upon him, still disturbing him,

as he walked past the College into Belsize Park, and so on up the Avenue, in the direction of home. Imagination running riot, he already saw himself standing on the deck of a steamer, outward bound; landing in a strange country, and posting letters, witty, delightful letters, narrating his adventures to Constance and the girls. Ah, how boyish, how idiotic he was! For him to go abroad with the little money that it was possible for him to get together would be insanity. If he travelled steerage, he must be almost penniless when he arrived—such a scheme would be to court destruction! No, he must remain where he was, and resign himself to the worst; but it was hard on Her—she had afforded him such chances. He wished she had not, since they had availed him nothing. He thought he would rather have been friendless and unaided than have been given aid and such a friend, only to show his worthlessness. It made his failure ten times

bitterer. By Heaven, his failure was reflected upon Mrs. Bouverie herself! She, also, was humiliated, and it was he who had humiliated her.

"Of all things in this world," said Frank Heath, reaching the doorstep, "the bitterest is to be given the ambitions of the artist and the capabilities of the clerk!" He sighed, and took out his latchkey, unconscious that he had flattered himself by inferring that he was competent to be a clerk.

He went heavily upstairs. His sisters' faces were expectant, as they came forward and kissed him.

"It may mean nothing, of course," said Marion, "but it was delivered by the second post, and—"

"And the MS. hasn't come yet, though it's late!" added Chrissie, with an excited little laugh. "Look!"

She pointed to a letter on the mantlepiece.

He did not dare to hope now, but he paled as he saw it was from Benson's, the last firm to whom the novel had been sent.

"Don't delude yourselves—" he began, huskily; and then the sentence broke on his lips.

Messrs. Benson and Sons wrote that, with regard to the MS. which Mr. Heath had kindly submitted to them, they would be glad if he would call upon them any day that week between eleven and one.

END OF VOL. I.

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